



Guideline: Discontinuing Services/Refusing Treatment

Introduction:

Within the context of the denturist-patient relationship, Registered Denturists and their patients enjoy mutually respectful and rewarding relationships that centre around the provision of denturism care and service. However, there are times in a professional setting when a Registered Denturist may find it necessary to discontinue services, refuse treatment, or turn away a referral. The decision to terminate a denturist-patient relationship is a serious one, frequently taken because the therapeutic relationship has become unproductive as a result of unresolved issues.

While Registered Denturists may identify patients to whom they will provide care and service, these decisions cannot infringe on the human rights of the prospective or existing patient. The Ontario Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination on the following grounds:

- Age;
- Citizenship, Ethnic Origin, Place of Origin, Creed;
- Disability;
- Ancestry, Colour, or Race;
- Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, Gender Expression; and/or
- Marital Status or Family Status

Registered Denturists are not permitted to discontinue ongoing patient services without adequate reasons. The [Professional Misconduct Regulation](#) sets out appropriate considerations that a Registered Denturist should undertake to determine whether discontinuing denturism services are warranted:

- i. The member's reasons for discontinuing the services,
- ii. the condition of the patient,
- iii. the patient has had a reasonable opportunity to arrange for the services of another member, or
- iv. the availability of alternative services.

These guidelines provide direction to Registered Denturists regarding the termination of a denturist-patient relationship.

Guidelines:

1. Prior to ending the denturist-patient relationship, the Registered Denturist must apply sound clinical judgement and compassion to determine the most appropriate course of action. This includes exhausting all other reasonable efforts to resolve the situation in the best interest of the patient.

2. When services that are needed are discontinued or refused, patients should not be abandoned. Reasonable attempts should be made to arrange for alternative services for the patient.
3. Registered Denturists must notify the patient of the decision to end the dentist-patient relationship:
 - a. Denturists are **advised** to notify the patient in person, whenever it is safe and possible to do so.
 - b. Denturists **must** provide in writing the reasons for discontinuing services, refusing treatment, or turning away a patient. Denturists must retain a copy of this notification and any confirmation of receipt in the patient's medical record. If written communication is not possible, the Denturist must note how the patient was notified.
4. When a patient has been referred to another practitioner, the Registered Denturist should ensure the timely transfer of medical records.
5. In the interest of greater clarity, Registered Denturists are advised to document all relevant information pertaining to the service termination including all steps undertaken to resolve the issue(s).

Some examples of when services may be refused or discontinued include:

- there are specific contraindications to the proposed treatment;
- the proposed treatment is outside the scope of practice of the Registered Denturist;
- a conflict of interest exists;
- the patient has demonstrated behaviour that significantly disrupts the practice. Such behaviours may include abusive or threatening language.
- the patient poses a risk of harm to the Registered Denturist, staff or other patients;
- the patient consistently fails to comply with treatment protocol; and/or
- the patient fails to comply with the dentist-patient agreement. Lack of compliance with the dentist-patient agreement can include missed appointments or the patient's failure to settle an account with the Registered Denturist.

Practice Scenario:

A patient has been consistently missing appointments. This is having a significant impact on the patient's treatment. When the patient does attend, they are cooperative and consistently follow through with the Registered Denturist's recommendations. The Registered Denturist has discussed the issue of the missed appointments with the patient to ensure they understand the impact, but they continue to miss many appointments.

Many Registered Denturists and their employers have attendance and cancellation policies that are reviewed with patients prior to the start of treatment. During this policy review, patients are made aware of the outcome of missed appointments.

In this scenario, the Registered Denturist may want to review any existing policies with patient and ask them to reconsider their commitment to the services offered. In general, when a patient stops attending appointments, attempts should be made to contact them and remind them of any attendance policy. A letter may be sent to them regarding the matter.

Practice Scenario:

A Registered Denturist had an employment relationship with a clinic. The employment relationship has been terminated abruptly and many of the Denturist's patients continue to require denturism care. Is it the Registered Denturist's responsibility to arrange for alternate services?

It is not necessarily the Registered Denturist's responsibility to arrange for alternate services in this situation. Ideally, the termination process and responsibilities of the employee and employer were determined when the employment contract was first negotiated. Regardless of when the discussion occurs, the primary concern in this scenario is that all of the Registered Denturist's patients need to be informed of the change in service provision and provided with information about opportunities for alternate service (i.e., plan for a replacement or alternate resources).

Although it may be the employer who does this, the Registered Denturist has an obligation to ensure that the employer is aware of the patient's right to information. In some situations, where the relationship is not amenable to open discussion, the Registered Denturist may need to communicate these expectations in writing to the employer. It is expected that the Registered Denturist will take all reasonable steps to ensure that the patients are advised of the options available to them.

In addition to providing notice to the patients, it is important that the patient records be maintained appropriately (e.g., securely and for the required time) and that access to these records be granted to the appropriate individuals. The Registered Denturist has an obligation to ensure the employer is aware of, and will meet, these requirements. The Registered Denturist may need to take further action if they do not have the confidence that the employer will follow through with this responsibility.

In some cases, there may be patients who want to continue to receive service from the original Registered Denturist. The Registered Denturist may be in a position to accommodate this request, providing it is not contrary to a previous contractual agreement and is done in an open and transparent manner.

Practice Scenario:

A Registered Denturist completed an assessment of a patient and provided a proposed treatment plan. The patient has indicated they are not in agreement with the plan and will not give consent to continue. As they do not want to proceed any further, the Registered Denturist is planning to discharge them. Is that appropriate?

It is not appropriate for a Registered Denturist to assume that refusal to proceed with a treatment is grounds for discontinuation of service. The patient's refusal to proceed means that they have not provided consent for the particular proposed treatment. The Registered Denturist should stop, pause and reflect on the collaborative and patient-centred nature of the denturist-patient relationship and manage the situation accordingly.

In this scenario the patient remains in need of services as identified in the assessment. Rather than moving to discharge planning, the Registered Denturist may need to ensure the patient is capable of making an informed decision to withdraw consent. If it is clear that the patient has the capacity to withdraw consent then the Registered Denturist must explore other factors. As informed consent includes the understanding of the risks associated with not receiving the intervention, the Registered Denturist should review these with the patient. The refusal to proceed may be due to any one of a number of

reasons (e.g., personal conflict, discomfort with the type of intervention, disagreement with the goals). It is necessary for the Registered Denturist to gain some further understanding of the problem and manage the situation accordingly. The patient must be provided with information about other options or alternatives prior to a decision to discontinue. If the patient is not deemed capable of withdrawing consent, then the Registered Denturist should be discussing the treatment plan and gaining consent from a substitute decision maker.

The discharge of the patient in this situation involves the ethical principle of respect for autonomy, recognizing the patients right to make choices for themselves, including the choice to decline proposed services.

Table of Changes

| Date | Revision |
|---------------|--|
| June 14, 2024 | Guidelines updated to harmonize with updated Professional Misconduct Regulation including new considerations undertaken by Denturist prior to discontinuing treatment. |
| May 22, 2022 | Original publication date. |