



Guide to Standard of Practice: Professional Collaboration

Do I need the patient's consent to collaborate with other health practitioners?

Yes, denturists need expressed consent to collaborate with other health practitioners. The patient controls the extent of interprofessional collaboration. If a patient is uncomfortable with it, the patient can direct practitioners not to share the patient's personal health information with others. The practitioner must comply with such a direction unless one of the exceptions in the Personal Health Information Protection Act (it is discussed in more detail below) applies.

Practitioners should discuss any planned interprofessional collaboration with the patient when possible. However, there are circumstances where prior patient consent is not possible (e.g., when the patient goes to the hospital in an emergency and the hospital calls asking about the patient's dentures). Practitioners can disclose information needed for the treatment of the patient without consent so long as the patient has not previously prohibited the practitioner from doing so.

Is it appropriate to comment on another health care professional's qualifications or services?

No, it is not appropriate to comment on another health professionals' qualifications or services other than to respectfully provide professional opinions that are necessary in the circumstances.

How do I collaborate with the patient?

Denturists must work with patients to create a treatment plan that addresses the patient's needs and goals and helps the patient understand the patient's role in the plan. Denturists must assist the patient to make informed decisions about their care and respect the patients' decisions about their treatment plan, including what care the patient will receive and who will provide that care.

How do I help the patient make an informed decision?

The denturist will need to present all of the information fairly and respectfully, factor in the patient's perspective, and where possible, present some middle ground, if there is any, with respect to the denturism advice. The focus should always be on achieving positive treatment outcomes for the patient.

How do I manage the collaborative relationship?

Problems or conflicts may arise that could interfere with the delivery of safe, quality care. This includes problems that arise from the behaviour of the patient, of other service providers or the denturist's own behaviour. Conflicting perspectives between health care providers are difficult to manage. Mixed messages are confusing for patients and a difference of opinion often involves difficult conversations between colleagues.

A denturist must recognize those problems or conflicts and take reasonable steps to resolve them in a collaborative way. This may involve the following steps:

- approach others with a collaborative attitude and an open mind;
- discuss the problem directly with the patient or the other service provider (if appropriate consent is obtained), and work together to identify the underlying cause;
- listen attentively to the other's point of view;
- obtain all of the facts;

- agree on how to resolve the problem and the desired outcomes;
- identify the consequences if the behavior, conflict, or situation is not resolved;
- appreciate that differences can enrich decision-making to provide some more comprehensive patient treatment;
- take appropriate action if the problem recurs;
- document the situation and the steps taken to resolve it.

What things should I keep in mind when working in a multi-disciplinary setting?

Where interprofessional collaboration involves working in a multi-disciplinary setting (i.e. in an oral health centre), other issues arise, including the following:

- Will the setting have shared records or will each practitioner have separate records?
- If the records are shared, will the practitioner keep any private notes outside of the shared record? If so how will the practitioner make sure that the other health care practitioners have access to the information they need?
- How does the setting deal with the wording used in the records? For example, will everyone use the same abbreviations?
- What happens to the records if the practitioner leaves to practise elsewhere? Will the patient be told where the practitioner has gone? Will another practitioner from the setting take over the patient's care? Will the patient be given a choice? It is preferable for the patient to be given a choice although some settings will only do so if the patient asks.
- Who is the health information custodian that owns the records?
- Will there be one person who has overall responsibility for coordinating the patient's care? If so who? If not, how will the patient's care be coordinated?
- How will disagreements in the approach to the care of the patient be dealt with? If it is the practitioner who is in disagreement, when and how does the practitioner tell the patient?
- Is the patient aware of all of the above?

Practice Scenario

Bruce, a denturist, practises alone. His patient, Brenda, also has a family dentist. Brenda's family dentist calls unexpectedly to say that Brenda is not accepting the dentist's recommendation for implants. The dentist has just learned that Bruce is also treating Brenda. The dentist wonders if anything that Bruce is doing might interfere with Brenda's decision. Bruce remembers that he has hinted to Brenda that, given her sensitivity to pain, she might not be a good candidate for implant surgery. What should Bruce say to the dentist?

In many respects, there has already been a failure of interprofessional collaboration in this case. Bruce should have already discussed with Brenda the benefits of interprofessional collaboration. Rather than hint at his concerns about the surgery, Bruce should have discussed the concerns openly with Brenda and requested permission (in writing) to speak with Brenda's dentist. At this point, however, Bruce should probably speak to Brenda first before talking to the dentist. It is not clear that Brenda would want such a discussion to take place and it is not an emergency. Bruce should obtain written permission from Brenda to speak to the dentist.

Practice Scenario

Carmen, a patient, needs a new set of dentures – she has been wearing her current pair for 15 years. Based on her situation, Carmen's treatment plan options include: 1) Fabricating a new set of dentures, similar to the old pair; or 2) Dentures over implants. Her denturist, Jessica, explains that treatment plan #1

is the most cost effective, #2 involves collaboration with a dentist, and #2 is the most expensive option but will most likely provide the best outcome. After reviewing the treatment plan options and discussing some of her concerns with Jessica and her dentist, Carmen selects treatment plan #2. Jessica receives Carmen's permission to discuss the case with her dentist so that they can collaborate on the plan of care.

Jessica was able to work with Carmen and the dentist to create a treatment plan that addressed Carmen's needs and goals. By presenting the different options, Jessica was able to assist Carmen in making an informed decision about her care, including the care that is provided and who is involved.

References

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Important Legal Principles Practitioners Need to Know, Jurisprudence Handbook, College of Denturists of Ontario, 2019.