

Ethics, Law and Professionalism in the European Dental Undergraduate Curriculum

Learning Outcomes

Introduction

Dentistry is a healthcare profession in which a dentist's knowledge, clinical skills, and judgement are used to protect and restore oral health and well-being. This purpose is realised through a partnership between dentist and patient, the profession and public, based on mutual respect, responsibility and accountability.

Knowledge of the ethical, legal and professional basis of dentistry is as essential to clinical practice as an understanding of the basic medical sciences and the development of clinical skills. The undergraduate curriculum should reflect this holistic approach and facilitate the development of good, caring dentists.

Good dentists make the care of patients their primary concern. They are clinically competent and keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date. They establish and maintain good relationships with patients and colleagues, communicate effectively, and treat each person as an individual. They work in partnership with patients, respecting patient choice and each patient's right to privacy and dignity. Good dentists are committed to high personal and professional standards; they are responsible, accountable and act within the law. They seek to protect and improve the oral health of their community and work to maintain the trust the public has in the profession, by raising concerns where necessary.

Ethics

Ethics provides the foundation for professionalism. The new graduate dentist must understand the ethical principles of healthcare and be competent to apply them in every aspect of dentistry. In common with other branches of healthcare, the core ethical principles are (i) the primacy of patient welfare, (ii) respect for patient autonomy and (iii) commitment to social justice (Medical Professionalism Project 2002, Lancet 359 pp 520-522)

Learning outcomes:

On graduation a dentist must:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the core ethical principles as they apply in dentistry
- Be competent to recognise ethical or unethical situations in dentistry
- Apply ethical principles in practice, whether in clinical dental practice or the business of dentistry

- Demonstrate an understanding of the need for consideration of and respect for others without prejudice in respect of gender, diversity of background and opportunity, language and culture
- Demonstrate respect for patient confidentiality
- Practise with respect for patient autonomy, patient choices and informed consent
- Act without delay if he/she believes that he/she, or a colleague, or the environment in which he/she is providing care, is putting someone at risk
- Demonstrate an awareness of the appropriate use of social media, mindful of how the content of their social media platforms may reflect on the profession - digital professionalism

Law

The new graduate dentist must have comprehensive knowledge of and the skills to comply with the regulatory system, legislation and codes of practice applicable to all aspects of the practice of dentistry in his/her own country.

Learning Outcomes:

On graduation a dentist must:

- Understand the regulation of the practice of dentistry, including the legal framework, in his/her own country and be able to comply with the law and the various codes of practice related to dentistry
- Understand and apply the law and guidelines relating to consent, particularly with regard to children and adults unable to consent for themselves
- Ensure that he/she is registered with the appropriate regulatory body before commencing practice
- Understand and ensure adherence to the scope of practice of all members of the dental team
- Adhere to the code or accepted standards of practice on advertising in all media
- Understand the implications of and be able to comply with general legislation or regulation in areas such as health and safety legislation, infection prevention and control procedures and data protection
- Know that if he /she moves to another country he/she is obliged to become familiar and comply with the legal framework in the country in which he/she is practising dentistry

Professionalism

Dental professionalism is a commitment to a set of values, behaviours and relationships that underpin the trust the public has in dentists. It is a complex, multi-dimensional construct which has

individual, interpersonal and societal dimensions. These are context dependent and encompass professionalism, ethics and law.

Professionalism is an overarching competence which must permeate all aspects of good dental practice. It can be understood as the manner in which one reflects on and reconciles different aspects of professional practice, demonstrating acceptance of professional responsibility and accountability. It is manifested in the manner in which good oral healthcare is provided. Accountability means that the healthcare professional is expected to be able to justify his/her actions to the patient, the profession and the society in which they work.

The values incorporated within professionalism reflect those of a good dentist.

Learning outcomes:

On graduation a dentist must:

- Demonstrate a holistic approach to patient care and strive to provide a high quality of patient care at all times
- Practise with understanding of the social concepts of healthcare, being conscious that it is a privilege to be entrusted with the healthcare of members of society and that with this privilege come responsibilities
- Demonstrate patient-centred care, ensuring that patients' interests come first and acting to protect them at all times
- Demonstrate an understanding of the role of self-awareness including an understanding of his/her own limitations
- Demonstrate the conceptual reasoning skills to think through problems and know when to take advice. Be able to select and prioritise treatment options that are sensitive to each patient's individual needs, goals and values, compatible with contemporary therapy and congruent with human rights, a comprehensive oral health care philosophy and healthcare economics
- Demonstrate skills in reflection on his/her own decisions, actions and performance and be able to apply this to learning and continuing professional development
- Demonstrate an understanding of the need to be able to account for and explain his/her actions and decisions with openness and transparency, having knowledge of the procedures involved in audit, clinical governance and peer review