



Policy: Professional Boundaries

Rational

The College of Denturists of British Columbia (CDBC) believes that the professional environment must protect the dignity and self-esteem of patients who seek the services of a registrant. CDBC is committed to ensuring that the public receives services from a registrant that are free from professional misconduct and that each patient is treated with respect.

The registrant is in a fiduciary relationship with his or her patients and, as such, has ethical and legal responsibilities to act in the patient's best interests.

Policy Statement

Professional Boundaries

Professional boundaries must be established between the registrant and patient, ensuring that:

- the patient is able to provide full, free and informed consent;
- patient autonomy is maintained at all times; and
- the registrant provides objective care to every patient.

Registrants must always maintain appropriate professional boundaries in their relationship with patients. This supports objectivity and the ability to keep the patient's interests as the primary focus for treatment and service delivery.

Professional judgement is required for registrants to make the best decision in determining professional boundaries. This can be difficult, since professional boundaries change over time depending on the person and the situation. For example, boundary crossings may be difficult to manage if a registrant is working in small, rural or remote areas where access to alternative health care providers is limited. However, there are circumstances in which it is never

acceptable to cross a professional boundary, such as entering into a sexual relationship with a current patient (refer to CDBC Policy: Misconduct of a Sexual Nature).

A boundary crossing occurs where you permit another type of relationship or feelings toward or from a patient to interfere with your professional registrant-patient relationship. Registrants must:

- accept responsibility for boundary crossings and violations as they occur;
- discuss any identified professional boundary issues with the patient;
- clarify roles and set or re-establish professional boundaries;
- where there is a potential or actual professional boundary issue that cannot be adequately resolved, arrange for patient treatment and care by another registrant or appropriate health care professional and end the registrant-patient relationship, ensuring that the patient is not adversely affected by any interruption in denture care.

Be sure to document any boundary violation that occurs, including the action taken to re-establish the professional boundaries of the relationship.

Registrant-Patient Relationship

An essential part to a registrant-patient relationship is the requirement for the registrant to obtain each patient's informed consent in relation to any treatment being offered or provided by the registrant. Informed consent refers to the process where the registrant and patient engage in a conversation and/or documents are provided to the patient that describe the proposed treatment, consequences, benefits, risks and alternative treatment options. Informed consent must be obtained at the beginning of the registrant-patient relationship and will continue as an ongoing process throughout the professional relationship.

The registrant-patient relationship is built on trust. When in the care of a registrant, the patient trusts that the registrant is a professional and will treat them in a professional manner. Exercising good professional judgement is essential in preventing violation of these boundaries.

CDBC does not condone the following registrant-patient relations:

- romantic or sexual relationship between registrant and a current patient;
- monetary gain from patients outside of the cost of the service/care provided; and
- bartering or exchanging health care services for other goods or services with a patient.

Professional Misconduct of a Sexual Nature

Professional misconduct may include unwelcome sexual attention, sexual solicitation or other sexually oriented remarks or behaviour. It may be written, verbal, physical or psychological in nature. It is important to recognize that both males and females may be the subject of sexual misconduct by members of either sex. Professional misconduct of a sexual nature is prohibited by law under the Criminal Code, the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, the *BC Human Rights Code* and by the professional standards and guidelines of CDBC. (Refer to CDBC Policy: Misconduct of a Sexual Nature.)

Gifts

When accepting a gift from a patient, registrants are required to use good judgement and to consider the following questions:

- will accepting this gift change the registrant-patient relationship?
- is the gift that is offered appropriate, including the monetary value?
- what is the patient's intention in offering the gift? and
- will the patient expect a different level of service if the gift is accepted?

Treating Family Members

Family members can be defined as a registrant's spouse or partner, parent, child, sibling, grandparent or grandchild. It may also be the immediate family of a registrant's spouse or partner. CDBC does not have a policy prohibiting the treatment of family members, however, if a registrant chooses to treat a family member, the following questions should be considered before treatment:

- could the relationship prevent the registrant from acting in this person's best interests?
- could treating this person be difficult because it would be too uncomfortable to ask the questions required to make a proper diagnosis?
- could this person feel uncomfortable providing truthful answers that are necessary for the diagnosis? and
- would the relationship with this person make it difficult to maintain registrant-patient confidentiality?

If the answer is 'yes' to any of the questions above, it is not advisable to proceed with treatment. If you consider treating a family member, that person should be treated with the same level of professionalism you would extend to any other patient.

Social Media

There are many social media tools available for health care professionals, including, but not limited to, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, YouTube and various blogging sites. These tools can be used to enhance professional networking and education, however, they also present potential risks. CDBC expects registrants to comply with professional expectations and the Code of Ethics when participating in social media platforms. Registrants are required to understand some of the potential risks when using social media outlets inappropriately, including.

- damage to professional image;
- breaches in patient privacy;
- violation of registrant-patient boundaries; and
- licensing and/or legal issues.

Reporting

CDBC considers any professional misconduct, including misconduct of a sexual nature, a serious offence. It is subject to the full range of disciplinary measures available to CDBC, including fines and/or suspensions. Complaints concerning professional misconduct of a sexual nature will be investigated by the Inquiry Committee and any other necessary organization, such as the Police.

Filing a Complaint

Any complaint about a registrant of CDBC, including professional misconduct of a sexual nature, should be forwarded, in writing, to:

**The Registrar
College of Denturists of BC
101 - 309 Sixth Street
New Westminster, BC V3L 3A7**

All formal allegations or complaints of misconduct received will be dealt with in a fair, unbiased and timely manner with due consideration for the rights and responsibilities of everyone involved.

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