

needed and should be shielded from view and free from the intrusion of coworkers and members of the public.

## DISCUSSION

All 50 states have laws in place that protect a woman's right to breastfeed in public places. Although their statutes differ in the details, it is clear that employers are legally required to provide

the private space for mothers to express breast milk for their infants.

Jerrold J: Got milk? *Am J Orthod Dentofacial Orthop* 155:739-740, 2019

Reprints not available

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# PATIENT MANAGEMENT

## Patient selection dilemmas



### BACKGROUND

Being selective about the patients a dentist decides to see can avoid trouble in the future. Dentists are not required to accept all patients into their practice as long as it doesn't become discrimination; they have the option to accept patients or refer them elsewhere. Guidelines for being selective with different patient situations were offered.

### NEW PATIENTS

First-time patients should be carefully evaluated to determine if they appear to be those with whom the dentist can form a long-term, productive, healthy doctor-patient relationship. Things to look for are as follows:

- Patients may arrive complaining about previous dentists they've seen, often over a short period of time, indicating they may be difficult to serve.
- Patients may try to dictate the treatment or refuse to follow the dentist's treatment recommendations. Patients cannot consent to negligent treatment, and dentists are bound to follow the standard of care. Failure to do so can lead to a liability claim.
- Patients may refuse to disclose previous dentists. Continuity of care includes contacting previous care providers to obtain the patient's history. Not knowing that history can put the dentist at risk when providing care.

### EMERGENCY PATIENTS

When a patient comes for emergency treatment, it's important for the dentist to spell out the limited scope of the relationship before delivering any care. The patient should understand that no doctor-patient relationship is being established beyond the provision of emergency treatment. The American Dental Association (ADA) Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct states that dentists are required ethically to make reasonable arrangements for emergency care for patients who aren't included in the

dentist's patients of record. The dentist should keep a list of phone numbers of clinics and dental societies to provide to emergency patients who have no established dental care provider.

Once the emergency treatment is completed, the dentist should document what was done and refer the patient back to his or her established dentist. If the dentist decides to keep the patient, there is a duty to provide care until one of the parties officially terminates the doctor-patient relationship.

### SECOND-OPINION PATIENTS

Some patients come for a second opinion on recommended treatment from another dentist. The dentist should inquire about the patient's motivation to confirm that the patient is acting in good faith. Basic questions to ask include the following:

- What brings you here today?
- How did you choose my office?
- Are you currently under the care of another dentist?
- When was your last dental visit?
- Why are you seeking a second opinion?

A patient who refuses to answer these questions should be approached cautiously. The patient should be told that not answering the questions prevents the dentist from completing a thorough assessment. It's wise to advise these patients to seek a second opinion elsewhere.

If the dentist decides to do the examination and finds questionable dentistry, the patient may have omitted important information. Rather than commenting on the findings, the patient should be told that it's difficult to make an accurate assessment with the information at hand. It's wise to stick to the facts and not offer subjective comments.

## NONCOMPLIANT PATIENTS

If noncompliant patients are allowed to remain in a dentist's practice despite their behavior, the dentist could be facing allegations of supervised neglect. Any care provided must be within the standard of care, but the patient's refusal of a specific treatment doesn't allow the dentist to achieve this standard. Terminating care may be the only reasonable option. If a dismissed patient wants to return, it's inadvisable to accept them back.

## FRIENDS AND RELATIVES

Although dentists often want to help their friends or relatives by providing affordable dental care, they may do so against their better judgment. Scenarios can become uncomfortable and escalate into high-risk situations. Documentation must be done religiously. Any care or treatment of a

friend or family member must be the same as for other patients.

### Clinical Significance

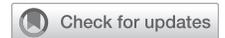
It can be hard to refuse to accept a patient for treatment but sometimes refusing to include the patient in your practice is the best choice for you. It's important to trust your instincts and avoid patients or treatment plans that make you feel uncomfortable.

TDIC Risk Management Staff: Patient selection: Instincts, courage and healthy relationships. *CDA J* 47:187-188, 2019

*Reprints not available*

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## Patient-centric practices



### BACKGROUND

Businesses that cater to the needs of customers and place customer satisfaction at the top of their goals are able to cultivate a sense of loyalty in their customers. Dentists can learn from companies such as Amazon and Disney, borrowing methods that will help to build successful practices. The pathway to a patient-centric practice involves several strategies.

### DEFINING PATIENT-CENTRIC PRACTICE

A patient-centric practice prioritizes the patient experience in all areas of practice management. Among the areas that are adapted to patient needs are the appointment process, chair time, collections, follow-up, and everything in between. This hyper-focus on patient satisfaction extends throughout all areas of the interaction. Often technologic advances to make dentistry more convenient, more accessible, and more enjoyable for patients are employed, but the personal touch must be retained.

### STRATEGIES

#### Connecting with the Office

Communication in a patient-centric dental office should be by e-mail and text messaging because those are the ways patients like to communicate. Patients will actually respond to e-mails and text messages. The messages are delivered in real time and provide ways for patients to confirm their appointments, reschedule, or be contacted for an earlier appointment should

an opening in the schedule occur. Patients like the convenience of these methods. Companies that provide services like these to dental practices include Lighthouse360 and Weave Communications.

#### Making Treatment Affordable

Patients often defer or refuse treatment if they know they can't afford it. Often they are embarrassed when they can't afford needed care, and dental professionals can be frustrated with the situation. The answer is to provide alternative payment options that help patients afford the treatment but also sends the message that the dentist is willing to make special efforts to provide needed care.

Several automated patient financing services are available. This lessens the burden of managing the program and keeps patients better informed and in charge of their own payment plans. Payment alternatives help dentists provide needed and wanted services to patients in a way that fits their situation.

#### Expanding Services

Changes seem to occur daily in dental practices. Innovative tools and new procedures often help improve profitability for dentists but also have great patient appeal because they save time and minimize patient discomfort. Dentists should stay up-to-date on what patients want so they can offer these services. Among the popular current trends are same-day restorations, in-office whitening treatments, and intraoral scanners, which reduce laboratory fees, improve communication