

ETHICAL GUIDELINES, DUTIES AND A CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE PROFESSION OF DENTAL TECHNOLOGY

v.3

Introduction

General ethical guidelines are generally considered to be value-oriented, whilst a specific code of conduct relating to the duties arising from ethical guidelines provides direction for action in particular situations. Such guidelines and duties also provide for guidance when considering any sanction for violation of ethics or conduct, based on correct ethical reasoning for any particular circumstance.

Acknowledgements

Much of the information contained here has been sourced from publications from the Council's Regulations relating to Acts and Omissions; the Health Professions Council of South Africa; the State of Ontario, Canada; Council for the professions complementary to medicine, Malta; Dental Council of New Zealand; General Dental Council, UK.

Note: The term 'technologist' includes 'technician'. Regulations for the category of Clinical Dental Technologist have not been promulgated, and so are not included here: as they will have the right to treat patients, they will fall under the guidelines of the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

Core ethical values and standards for good practice

PROFESSIONAL VALUE	STANDARD (DIRECTIVES)
Respect for persons	Dental technologists should respect their clients and their clients' patients, as well as their colleagues as persons, and acknowledge their intrinsic worth, dignity, and sense of value
Best interests or well-being: Non-maleficence	Dental technologists should not produce work that may harm or act against the best interests of patients or clients, even when the interests of the latter conflict with their own self-interest.
Best interest or well-being: Beneficence	Dental technologists should produce work to the best of their ability in the best interests of patients or clients, even when the interests of the latter conflict with their own personal self-interest.
Human rights	Dental technologists should recognise the human rights of all individuals
Integrity	Dental technologists should incorporate these core ethical values and standards as the foundation for their character and practice as responsible health care professionals.
Truthfulness	Dental technologists should regard the truth and truthfulness as the basis of trust in their professional relationships with their clients and their clients' patients.
Confidentiality	Dental technologists should treat personal or private information as confidential in professional relationships with their colleagues, their clients and their clients' patients - unless overriding reasons confer a moral or legal right to disclosure.
Tolerance	Dental technologists should respect the rights of people to have different ethical beliefs as these may arise from deeply held personal, religious or cultural convictions.
Justice	Dental technologists should treat all individuals and groups in an impartial, fair and just manner.
Professional competence and self-improvement	Dental technologists should continually endeavour to attain the highest level of knowledge and skills required within their profession.
Community	Dental technologists should strive to contribute to the betterment of society in accordance with their professional abilities and standing in the community.



Ethical Dilemmas

To assist in the application of guidelines to specific situation, and especially when principles may be in conflict, the following process of ethical reasoning is recommended.

1. **Formulate the problem:** is it an ethical problem and is there a better way of understanding it?
2. **Information:** gather all the relevant (technical, personal, social, etc.) data. Consult authoritative sources such as these guidelines, voluntary associations, respected colleagues and see how others generally deal with such matters
3. **Options:** consider all reasonable options, choices or actions in the circumstances.
4. **Moral assessment:** Weigh the ethical content of each option by asking -
 - a. What are the likely consequences of each option?
 - b. What are the most important values, duties, and rights? Which weighs the heaviest?
 - c. What are the weaknesses of your view?
 - d. How would you want to be treated in the circumstances of the case?
5. **Discussion:** Discuss your proposed solution with those whom it will affect
6. **Act:** act on your decision with sensitivity to others affected
7. **Evaluate:** evaluate your decision and be prepared to act differently in the future

Ethical principles

The over-arching principles can be summarised as the following, all of which have equal value: put your clients' patients interests first; provide the highest quality of your work; ensure safe practises and procedures; communicate effectively; maintain public trust and confidence; respect your profession and its regulator.

Duties explained

As a health care professional a dental technologist must undertake different roles, and therefore must be aware of different duties as follows.

1. **Natural, or un-acquired general duties:** for example to refrain from doing harm, to promote the good, or to be fair and just, are duties simply by being part of the human community, and are independent of any professional qualifications.
2. **Moral obligations or acquired general duties:** duties acquired by virtue of being a licensed health professional, such as to produce dental appliances of the highest quality, respect colleagues and clients and clients' patients, be truthful at all times and not transgress legal or ethical codes.
3. **Institutional duties:** these are for those working in institutions who will have additional duties set out in such aspects as job descriptions, employment contracts, etc.

Duties to clients, clients' patients and colleagues

Work with and respect other health-care professionals in the dental team in common pursuit of the best outcome for all patients. Respect without prejudice, diversity of background and opportunity, language and culture.



Do not offer or accept any discount from any dentist on the agreed price for dental technology work, either with the intention that the difference between the amount agreed upon and the discounted amount reflecting on the invoice will be paid to the dentist directly or indirectly either in monetary terms, gifts, favours or otherwise; or represent yourself or allow yourself to be represented, directly or indirectly, as being prepared to do dental technology work at less than such agreed price.

Do not employ any person other than those registered with the SADTC for performance of acts specifically pertaining to the profession of dental technology.¹

Do not refer dental technology work to unauthorised persons with the intention of such dental technology work being performed by any such person.

Do not discuss or negotiate with the patient of a dentist, the manufacture, repair or delivery of a dental appliance, or part of such appliance, without such dentist being present, unless such patient is referred by a registered dentist in writing either by conventional or electronic communication.

Do not carry out any clinical procedures directly on a patient.

Always inform a dentist or other dental technician subcontractor of any professional limitation, lack of experience or unfamiliarity with a particular material, technique or technology.

Do not sign official documents such as reports and certificates unless your name is printed next to your signature.

Duties in terms of knowledge and skills

Maintain and improve the standard of your work by keeping your professional knowledge and skills up to date throughout your working life by taking part in educational activities on a regular basis. Accept the fact that you cannot know everything about dental technology.

Attend properly, in a professional manner and to the best of your ability, to all dental technology work entrusted to you.

Appreciate the importance of, and practise at all times, honesty and trustworthiness.

Keep up to date with the laws that govern your profession. Understand that laws and regulations may change and it is your responsibility to keep up to date with those affecting your work.

Comply with infection control standards and recommendations from Council.

Always reply, within a reasonable period, to any form of correspondence and deal appropriately with all forms of communication which reasonably require a reply or response.

Comply with an instruction, requirement or request from the Council or a request from the Registrar or their duly appointed and authorised staff.

Do not perform any wilful act or omission which prevents or is calculated to prevent the Council or any of its committees or the Registrar or their duly and authorised staff from carrying out their statutory duties with special reference to Chapter 4 of the Act.

¹ At the time of writing, laboratory assistants can be employed, until Regulations for their registration are promulgated.



Refrain from engaging in activities that may affect your health and lead to impairment.

Inform the Council when a physical or mental disease/condition has affected or may affect over time, your ability to practise safely or competently.

Inform the Council if you are subject to criminal proceedings or a regulatory finding is made against you anywhere in the world.

Duties in maintaining a professional laboratory

Conform to the requirements for registration of your laboratory with the Council. Maintain a safe work environment and identify and appropriately manage potential hazards, and behavioural risks.

Keep books of accounts and records in accordance with any legal requirements in respect of all the financial transactions relating to the dental laboratory.

Do not allow books of accounts and records to go more than a month without being written up or balanced apart from adhering to the standard accounting legislation, rules and practices.

Ensure that all records pertaining to dental technology services and containing personal information are safely and securely stored in accordance with the appropriate laws.

For your professional stationery, conform at all times to the Regulations as published by the Council.

Do not use any stationery or printed material of any description which, in the opinion of the council, does not benefit the dignity, prestige and status of the profession.

Do not undertake printing of bulk brochures, leaflets or any related and or similar information that has the intention of redirecting the public from the services of a dentist and to promote personal financial gain. However, such information may be placed in a dental surgery on the request of a dentist, which content must be agreed upon by all parties concerned, in which case the agreement or consent must be in writing either in hard copy or electronically.

Do not consult with a person other than a dentist, dental technician or dental technologist who has the intention to divert the public with direct financial gain intended and to illicitly educate and provide the public with information.

Do not allow or enable in any manner, directly or indirectly, a person other than a registered dental technician contractor or his or her authorised and duly appointed staff or agent or dentist to collect moneys, recover or receive such moneys or to receive any remuneration in respect of work done specially pertaining to the dental technology profession.

Do not abandon your obligations as a dental technician contractor without prior notice to dentists or other dental technician contractors who have placed orders with you for dental technology work without arranging for the completion and dispatch of such work.

Do not be absent as a registered dental technician contractor for a period of time without a registered and suitably qualified dental technologist or dental technician contractor that can oversee the work and take the required responsibility during the agreed period away from the laboratory.



Protect the environment and the public by assuring that laboratory waste is disposed of legally and in an environmentally friendly manner.

Duties to society

Do not provide a service that is not needed, whether it provides financial gain or not.

Refrain from unnecessary wastage, and from participating in improper financial arrangements, especially those that escalate costs and disadvantage individuals or institutions unfairly.

Duties to your profession

Strive to always uphold the honour and dignity of your profession by displaying professional standards of integrity and behaviour.

Do not make malicious or unfounded criticisms of colleagues that may undermine the profession.

Do not canvass, in person, employed dental technicians or dental technologists as potential employees during working hours at the place of employment of such potential employees. This excludes electronic mass communications regarding available work opportunities.

Do not advertise, directly or indirectly, in order to draw attention to your practice, services or your professional proficiency, knowledge and qualifications for your immediate or eventual professional gain, unless in the case of a registered laboratory as provided for in the Regulations.

Do not associate your name in connection with advertisements for dental instruments, appliances or materials; appeals to the public on behalf of medical health funders, associations or similar commercial organisations; or advertising in any public space, including on public dustbins, at bus stations and taxi ranks, on vehicles or billboards intended for mass advertising or any similar facilities or spaces.

If simultaneously employed by more than one employer in the dental technology field, or a related field, as a dental technician or dental technologist, you must obtain the first employer's consent and the approval of the council.

If establishing a website for the intention of informing dentists on the services available or informing and educating the public on oral health options in terms of materials and technology available, as well as general instructions on how to take care of newly acquired dental appliances, the website must be designed in such a way that it conforms to the Regulations of the Council relating to this.

Report violations and seek redress in circumstances where you have good or persuasive reason to believe that the rights of clients, clients' patients or colleagues are being violated. Guidelines for reporting will be published by Council.

Report any laboratories that you believe may be operating illegally.

Where it is in your power, protect someone who reports misconduct from victimisation or intimidation.

Precautionary measures when using social media



Dental technologists must be aware that, even with a pseudonym, their identity and location can be traced through their linked accounts or IP address.

Even with advanced security measures and end-to-end encryption, complete privacy on social media cannot be guaranteed, so that it is possible that content may be shared beyond your personal network.

You must understand that any information you post will remain on the internet permanently even if you delete it as it may be copied or reproduced by other users before it has been deleted; many websites and internet browsers use cache and cookie systems that inconspicuously store data.

Do not use social media when stressed, tired, upset or under the influence of alcohol.

If you are uncertain about whether it is ethically and legally permissible to share particular content via social media, it is best not to do so.

