

What Should A Good Orthodontist Do?

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ABSTRACT

The word “moral” is defined as relating to the principles of right and wrong in behavior and “ethics” is defined as a system of moral values or the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group and deals with the values relating to human conduct, with respect to the right and wrong of certain actions and to the goodness and badness of the motives and ends of such actions. An orthodontist must follow basic bioethical principles such as benevolence, autonomy, causing no harm, and justice in order to instill the patient-doctor trust and to have healthy clinical practice. It should be emphasized that the use of these principles is of extreme importance in facing the ethical issues common to clinical practice.

INTRODUCTION

Ethics are the moral principles or virtues that govern the character and conduct of an individual or a group, as a branch of both philosophy and theology, is the systematic study of what is right and good with respect to the character and conduct.^[1]

According to UNESCO Bioethics can be defined as the systematic, pluralistic and interdisciplinary study involving the theoretical and practical moral issues raised by the life sciences and humanity’s relationship with the biosphere.^[3]

Several aspects that directly influence a population’s access to public dental services and actions that contribute to inequities in oral health are questions of ethical content and should be examined from ethical standpoints, especially protection and intervention bioethics.^[2]

An orthodontist must follow basic bioethical principles such as beneficence, autonomy, non- maleficence and justice to instill the patient-doctor trust and to have healthy clinical practice. It should be emphasized that the use of these principles is of extreme importance in facing the ethical issues common to clinical practice.

Patient autonomy (“self-governance”)

It expresses the concept that professionals have a duty to treat the patient according to the patient’s desires, within the bounds of accepted treatment, and to protect the patient’s confidentiality. Under this principle, the dentist’s primary obligations include involving patients in treatment decisions

in a meaningful way, with due consideration being given to the patient’s need, desires and abilities, and safeguarding the patient’s privacy.^[5]

Non-maleficence(“do no harm”)

This principle expresses the concept that professionals have a duty to protect the patient from harm. Under this principle, the dentist’s primary obligations include keeping updated knowledge and skills, knowing one’s own limitations and when to refer to a specialist or other professional, and knowing when and under what circumstances delegation of patient care to auxiliaries is appropriate.^[5]

Beneficence(“do good”)

This principle expresses the concept that professionals have a duty to act for the benefit of others. Under this principle, the dentist’s primary obligation is service to the patient and the public-at-large. The most important aspect of this obligation is the competent and timely delivery of dental care within the bounds of clinical circumstances presented by the patient, with due consideration being given to the needs, desires and values of the patient. The same ethical considerations apply whether the dentist engages in fee-for-service, managed care or some other practice arrangement. Dentists may choose to enter into contracts governing the provision of care to a group of patients; however, contract obligations do not excuse dentists from their ethical duty to put the patient’s welfare first.^[5]

Justice (fairness)

This principle expresses the concept that professionals have a

duty to be fair in their dealings with patients, colleagues and society. Under this principle, the dentist's primary obligations include dealing with people justly and delivering dental care without prejudice. In its broadest sense, this principle expresses the concept that the dental profession should actively seek allies throughout society on specific activities that will help improve access to care for all.^[5]

AREAS OF CONCERN

Quality of Care

Dentist need to provide good quality care to patients to justify the faith with which patient has approached the dentist.^[6] Fully documented and complete information regarding patient's treatment must be shared with the patient.

Advertising

Advertising is one such factor linked with quality of care. The primary concern is dentists whose marketing and advertising activities are considered unprofessional.^[6] Many dentists believe that aggressive marketing practices such as discount ploys are not only in bad taste but also diminish the profession in the public.

Relationship with the patients

Doctor- patient relationship is the pillar in the success of clinical practice. The relationship starts by voluntary and mutual consent between doctor and patient. The International Principles of ethics for the dental profession states "the needs of the patient are the overriding concern..." the traditional interpretation of doctor-patient relationship in which dentist made the decisions and the patient submitted to them, has almost been completely eliminated. Unless the patient is unable to take decisions or unwilling to take decisions in which the autonomy becomes questionable.^[1]

Split Fees In Advertising And Marketing Services

The prohibition against a dentist's accepting or tendering rebates or split fees applies to business dealings between dentists and any third party, not just other dentists.^[7] Thus, a dentist who pays for advertising or marketing services by sharing a specified portion of the professional fees collected from prospective or actual patients with the vendor providing the advertising or marketing services is engaged in fee splitting.^[7] The prohibition against fee splitting is also applicable to the marketing of dental treatments or procedures via "social coupons" if the business arrangement between the dentist and the concern providing the marketing services for that treatment or those procedures allows the issuing company to collect the fee from the prospective patient, retain a defined percentage or portion of the revenue collected as payment for the coupon marketing service

provided to the dentist and remit to the dentist the remainder of the amount collected.^[7]

Poor knowledge and attitude toward ethics among our dental practitioners

Every professional body has its own code of conduct for its members. The Dental Council of India (DCI) regulates dental profession in India. According to the surveys done by Sabarinath B, Sivapathasundharam B in Chennai show that only 65% of the dental professionals know and follow the ethical norms stated by the Indian government.^[8]

Increase in cost of oral health service

Rising cost of health care can limit patient access to health care, limited resources can lead to rationing and delaying, and denial of care to people in need. Escalating cost can lead to inverse care law.^[4] The disparity in the economic status forces the budding doctors to opt for a sector where they are highly paid and thus not opting for rural service and thus making them suffer.^[4]

Poor medical record maintenance

As the consumer negligence cases are increasing, it is important to maintain medical records.^[4] Subject experts felt that "Medical Record is a legal document and reference for future cases. It safeguards the dentists against fraud/false statements by patients which are intended to harm/defame them."^[4]

METHODS

The documents were analyzed individually by using Bardin's method of reading, which consists of a pre-analytical reading, exploration of the material, and interpretation. During the qualitative analysis, all the text passages containing bioethical reference to the principles of autonomy, beneficence, and non-maleficence were highlighted and extracted for further analysis. Keywords used for search were "Ethics", "Bioethics", "Moral", "Orthodontics" and "Orthodontist"

CONCLUSION

Bioethics is not just one subject but also a complex of several moral values such as autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence and justice. Bioethics is an approach of confronting different moral issues in both dental and medical field. Health authorities are responsible for the reasonable and effective well being of the population by ensuring access to health services and other health programs and it is their Protective responsibility to control the outcome of adopted policies and the evaluation of the performance of institutions and their employees.

Bioethics must be taught effectively and practiced in our dental schools. It is necessary that bioethical values, such as dignity, human rights, respect for autonomy and vulnerability, are

discussed and incorporated into academic practice.^[2]

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