

I'm not a robot



A dentist and their patient's connection is at the heart of dental care triumphs. It stands strong on trust, respect, and a united promise to stay healthy. But sometimes, this bond hits bumps, making the tough choice of parting ways seem necessary. Digging into the ****em>why**** behind a dentist saying goodbye to a patient holds the key to keeping dental practice noble and keeping everyone involved happy and healthy. This article delves into the complexities surrounding patient dismissal, exploring the scenarios that may lead to such a decision and the impact it has on dental practice management. At the heart of any dentist-patient relationship is a foundation of trust and mutual respect. Patients trust their dentists to provide them with the best possible care, while dentists trust their patients to follow through with treatment plans and respect the practice's policies. When this trust is broken, it can compromise the effectiveness of care and the operational efficiency of the practice. Dentists, like all healthcare providers, are bound by a set of legal and ethical obligations that guide their professional conduct. These obligations ensure that patient care is delivered in a manner that is respectful, non-discriminatory, and in the best interest of the patient's health. Dismissing a patient, therefore, requires a careful navigation of these obligations to ensure that the decision is justified and free from any form of discrimination or prejudice. For more detailed guidelines on managing patient dismissal ethically and legally, dental professionals can refer to the American Dental Association: Managing Patient Dismissal. Dismissing a patient from a dental practice is a decision that carries significant implications for practice management. It affects not only the patient in question but also the practice's reputation, its operational dynamics, and the well-being of the dental team. Let's explore how patient dismissal impacts various aspects of dental practice management. Maintaining a Safe and Respectful Environment One of the primary reasons for patient dismissal is to maintain a safe and respectful environment for both staff and other patients. Unruly or abusive behavior can disrupt the practice's operations and compromise the safety and comfort of everyone involved. In such cases, dismissal is a necessary step to protect the well-being of the dental team and ensure that the practice remains a welcoming place for all patients. Upholding Professional Standards and Patient Care Dentists are committed to providing the highest standard of care to their patients. When a patient consistently refuses to comply with treatment recommendations or fails to adhere to practice policies, it can hinder their own health outcomes and disrupt the practice's ability to care for other patients effectively. Dismissal, in these instances, is often a last resort to uphold the practice's standards and ensure that all patients receive the care they need. For insights into balancing patient rights with provider responsibilities, the Guidelines on Patient Rights and Responsibilities offer a comprehensive overview. Legal and Ethical Considerations The decision to dismiss a patient also involves navigating complex legal and ethical considerations. Dentists must ensure that the dismissal does not constitute wrongful abandonment and that it is carried out in a manner that respects the patient's rights. This includes providing adequate notice, assisting with the transition to another provider, and documenting the reasons for dismissal thoroughly. The Role of Communication in the Dismissal Process Effective communication is key to managing the dismissal process with sensitivity and professionalism. It involves clearly explaining the reasons for dismissal to the patient, offering guidance on finding alternative care, and ensuring that the process is conducted with the utmost respect for the patient's dignity and well-being. The decision to dismiss a patient from a dental practice is a complex and challenging one, fraught with legal, ethical, and professional considerations. It is a decision that is never taken lightly and always with the best interests of both the patient and the practice in mind. Dentists can navigate this difficult process by understanding the reasons behind patient dismissal and its impact on dental practice management with compassion, professionalism, and respect for all involved. In managing the delicate balance between upholding professional standards and ensuring patient care, dentists must navigate through a myriad of legal implications, ethical considerations, and documentation best practices. The ultimate goal is to maintain a safe, respectful, and efficient dental practice that serves the best interests of all patients while adhering to the highest standards of dental care. Professional Protector Plan for Dentists: Risk Management Resources offers further insights into managing risks in dental practices, including patient dismissal, to safeguard the practice's interests and maintain a high standard of patient care. In the realm of dental practice, certain situations necessitate the difficult decision to dismiss a patient. These scenarios often involve complex interactions and behaviors that challenge the dentist-patient relationship. Understanding these scenarios is crucial for dental professionals as they navigate the intricacies of practice management and patient care. The Impact of Patient Behavior on Dental Practice Verbal or Physical Abuse Towards Staff or Other Patients: A safe and respectful environment is paramount in any healthcare setting. When a patient exhibits unruly or abusive behavior, it not only disrupts the practice's operations but also affects the well-being of staff and other patients. Such behavior can manifest as aggressive language, physical threats, or harassment, making it a liability to the practice's safety and reputation. Sexual Inappropriateness in the Dental Office: Instances of sexual inappropriateness are particularly egregious, violating the sanctity of the professional environment and posing direct harm to the practice's staff and patients. These actions warrant immediate dismissal to protect all parties involved and maintain a professional atmosphere. Case Study: Dismissal Due to Harassment and Threats: Consider the case where a patient's aggressive behavior escalated beyond acceptable bounds, including threats to staff and attempts to undermine the practice's reputation. The decision to dismiss such a patient, while difficult, was necessary to safeguard the practice's integrity and ensure the safety of its employees and clientele. The Challenges of Patient Non-compliance Repeated Missed Appointments Without Notice: Regular attendance is crucial for the success of dental treatments. Patients who frequently miss appointments without notice disrupt the practice's schedule, affecting its operational efficiency and the care of other patients. Such behavior can strain resources and reduce the practice's ability to provide timely care to all its patients. Refusal to Follow Recommended Treatment Procedures: When patients refuse to adhere to the treatment plans designed for their health, it not only hampers their own recovery but also places additional strain on the practice. This refusal can take various forms, from rejecting professional advice to insisting on alternative treatments that are not in their best interest. Case Study: Dismissal for Dictating Treatment Preferences: A patient who insists on using a specific, non-recommended material for their treatment, despite professional advice to the contrary, exemplifies this scenario. After thorough discussions and attempts to educate the patient on the best course of action, dismissal may become the only viable option to maintain the practice's standards of care and professional integrity. Financial Responsibilities and Patient Dismissal Distinguishing Between Inability and Unwillingness to Pay: Financial considerations are a sensitive aspect of dental care. While practices often strive to accommodate patients' financial situations through payment plans or sliding scales, a clear distinction must be made between patients who are unable to pay and those who are unwilling. The latter poses a significant challenge to the financial sustainability of the practice. Implementing Payment Plans and Financial Agreements: Practices may offer various options to assist patients with their financial obligations. However, when a patient refuses to honor these agreements, it undermines the trust between the patient and the practice and may necessitate dismissal to protect the practice's financial health. Case Study: Dismissal Due to Refusal to Pay for Services Rendered: A patient who agrees to a treatment plan and its associated costs but subsequently refuses to make payment exemplifies this scenario. Despite efforts to resolve the issue through communication and flexible payment options, dismissal becomes necessary when it is clear the patient has no intention of fulfilling their financial obligations. When Patient Behavior Warrants Dismissal Recognizing Patterns of Problematic Behavior: Identifying and documenting patterns of non-compliant behavior is crucial for justifying a dismissal. This includes a range of actions from repeated no-shows to aggressive behavior towards staff. Documentation helps in making an informed decision and provides a basis for the dismissal process. Importance of Comprehensive Documentation: Keeping detailed records of all interactions, incidents, and attempts at resolution is essential. This documentation supports the practice's decision in the event of a dispute and ensures that the dismissal process is conducted fairly and transparently. Best Practices for a Smooth "Patient Divorce": The process of dismissing a patient should be handled with care to minimize potential backlash and legal risks. This includes providing adequate notice, offering assistance in finding alternative care, and ensuring that the dismissal is communicated in a respectful and professional manner. Dismissing a patient is never an easy decision, but it is sometimes necessary to protect the integrity of the dental practice, ensure the safety and well-being of staff and patients, and uphold the highest standards of professional care. Yes, a dentist can legally dismiss a patient, provided the reasons for dismissal do not violate anti-discrimination laws or constitute patient abandonment. It's essential for the dentist to follow a proper procedure, including giving adequate notice and assisting the patient in finding another provider, to avoid legal repercussions. If you are dismissed by your dentist, it's important to seek clarification on the reasons for dismissal and any recommendations for your ongoing dental care. You should also promptly look for another dentist to ensure continuity of care. It may be beneficial to reflect on the reasons for dismissal to prevent similar issues in the future. The required notice period can vary depending on state laws and the terms of the dentist-patient agreement. However, it is generally recommended that dentists provide at least 30 days' notice to allow the patient sufficient time to find alternative dental care. Yes, a dentist can refuse treatment if a patient's behavior negatively impacts the safety, efficiency, or environment of the dental practice. This includes unruly or abusive behavior, non-compliance with treatment plans, and financial non-compliance. The decision should be made with consideration to ethical guidelines and the well-being of both the practice and the patient. Ethical considerations include ensuring the dismissal does not compromise the patient's health, providing adequate notice and assistance in finding alternative care, and avoiding discrimination. Dentists should aim to act in the best interest of the patient's health and safety, while also maintaining the integrity and standards of the dental practice. Navigating the complexities of dentist-patient relationships, especially when it comes to the difficult decision of dismissing a patient, requires a delicate balance of legal, ethical, and professional considerations. The scenarios outlined in this article highlight the most common reasons for such a decision, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a safe, respectful, and efficient dental practice environment. For dental professionals, understanding these scenarios and the appropriate steps to take can help manage these situations with professionalism and care. For patients, recognizing the reasons behind potential dismissal can foster a more cooperative and productive relationship with their dental care providers. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that both dentists and patients can engage in a relationship that is beneficial, respectful, and conducive to the highest standards of dental care. You may be trying to access this site from a secured browser on the server. Please enable scripts and reload this page. Managing a dental practice involves not only providing excellent care but also maintaining a professional and harmonious environment. Sometimes, dismissing a patient becomes necessary. This guide explores the common reasons for patient dismissal and offers strategies to handle the process professionally. Why Dismiss a Dental Patient? While dentists aim to build long-term relationships with their patients, there are circumstances where discontinuing care is in the best interest of both parties. Understanding these reasons helps ensure the decision is ethical, legal, and maintains the practice's reputation. Common Reasons to Dismiss a Dental Patient 1. Non-Compliance with Treatment Plans Patients who consistently fail to follow recommended treatment plans can hinder their own oral health progress and disrupt the practice's workflow. Repeated non-compliance despite reminders may necessitate dismissal. 2. Disruptive Behavior Maintaining a respectful and calm environment is crucial in a dental practice. Patients exhibiting aggressive, abusive, or disruptive behavior towards staff or other patients can create a hostile atmosphere, warranting dismissal. 3. Non-Payment or Financial Issues Consistently late payments or refusal to settle bills can strain the financial health of a practice. Before dismissing, it's important to attempt resolving payment issues through communication and payment plans. 4. Chronic No-Shows or Cancellations Frequent cancellations or no-shows disrupt scheduling and reduce the practice's efficiency. Implementing a clear cancellation policy can help, but persistent issues may lead to considering dismissal. 5. Ethical Concerns If a patient requests unethical procedures or tries to manipulate treatment outcomes for personal gain, it's essential to uphold professional standards by discontinuing care. How to Dismiss a Dental Patient Professionally Dismissal should be handled with care to maintain professionalism and comply with legal obligations. Here are steps to ensure a smooth transition: 1. Review Documentation Ensure that all interactions, missed appointments, and communications are well-documented. This provides a clear rationale for dismissal and protects the practice legally. 2. Communicate Clearly and Respectfully Arrange a private meeting or send a formal letter explaining the reasons for dismissal. Use clear, non-confrontational language and provide specific examples of issues leading to this decision. 3. Provide Adequate Notice Offer sufficient time for the patient to find alternative care. Typically, a 30-day notice is standard, but this may vary based on the reason for dismissal. 4. Transfer Medical Records Ensure the patient's medical records are transferred to their new provider promptly. Follow HIPAA guidelines to protect patient confidentiality during this process. 5. Maintain Professionalism Avoid expressing personal feelings about the patient. Keep communications factual and focused on the best interests of both the patient and the practice. Using Technology to Manage Patient Relationships Tools like Denota can streamline administrative tasks, allowing dentists to focus on patient care. With features such as AI-enhanced note writing and administrative task management, Conclusion While dismissing a patient is never an easy decision, understanding the common reasons and following a professional process can help maintain the integrity and success of your dental practice. By addressing issues promptly and respectfully, dentists can foster a positive environment for both their patients and their team. Start Your 7-Day Free Trial with Denota Today! Sometimes it's best for a dentist and patient to part ways. In these cases, this is because there's some friction that can't be resolved or a difference in philosophies of care. The dentist has the right to dismiss a patient in situations where it is impossible to resolve differences or if the dentist cannot abide the patient's behavior within the practice, as long as the dismissal is not for a legally impermissible discriminatory reason. Consult the appropriate state laws and your state dental practice act to determine any requirements about dismissing a patient, including how many days you need to be available to that patient in case of an emergency. Handle every patient dismissal cordially and professionally. It should never become personal. Develop a template for a dismissal letter. Fill in the details about the cause for the release objectively and advise the patient of the need to find another provider. Also detail the number of days you will be available to treat the patient in the event of an emergency. Conduct regular audits of patient records to determine whether problem patients are seen on a regular basis. While you should document all communications with patients in their record, including phone calls, it's especially important that you do this when dismissing a patient. That type of information, while considered a best practice in any situation, can be especially helpful in dismissal cases that can become emotionally charged. Additional Resources: Sample Patient Dismissal Letters (PDF) The dentist-patient relationship is the core of dentistry. Just like in any relationship, there inevitably will be a negative experience, and nearly all dentists will need to dismiss a patient at some point in their careers. Dismissals can be upsetting for patients and stressful for dentists. Regardless of whether you have conducted a patient dismissal previously, it is always good to review and possibly revise your dismissal procedure to ensure you follow the best practices for terminating the relationship. This will help you avoid facing any proceedings for professional misconduct. When a patient displays a lack of confidence in their dentist's abilities; fails to adhere to instructed treatment plans; misses appointments; refuses to pay outstanding fees; agreed-upon payments; or exhibits belligerent behaviour, terminating the patient-dentist relationship may be the only option. The dentist has the legal ability to dismiss a patient when the patient-dentist relationship has broken down beyond repair. The following considerations will help minimize the risks that accompany dismissing a patient from a dental practice. Patient dismissal should be a last resort. Circumstances are unique. Dentists have a professional obligation to develop, maintain, and foster positive relationships with their patients. Therefore, it is important not to turn to patient dismissal prematurely. Communication, attentive listening, and displays of empathy can quickly diffuse a situation with a dissatisfied patient. Reasonable efforts must be made to accommodate the patient's needs. Document. Many factors can lead to a patient dismissal. Document any concerns that may suggest a breakdown in the dentist-patient relationship, as well as any efforts made to save this relationship in the patient's records. As with all recordkeeping, documentation should be timely and accurate. Ultimately, dismissal is best achieved through a written letter sent by registered mail with a return receipt or by alternative means that confirms delivery. Include the registered mail receipt and letter in the patient file. Provide reasoning. The circumstances leading to your decision may vary, but always remember you must have a reasonable cause for terminating the relationship. Under human rights legislation, you are prohibited from refusing or dismissing patients based on protected classes such as age, race, nationality, disability, gender identity, and family status. Close the loop on care. Within reason, fulfill outstanding dental needs prior to dismissal. This does not necessarily mean seeing through an entire treatment plan. However, you also don't want to expose yourself to an allegation of patient abandonment. For example, it would be prudent to cement a final crown, restore or extract a symptomatic tooth, or insert a permanent denture. If a patient is experiencing severe pain, inflammation, or suffering from a life-threatening condition, that may not be the time to dismiss them. On the other hand, if the patient chooses not to return to the office for the remainder of their treatment, be sure to inform the patient of any currently diagnosed oral condition, as well as any treatment recommendations and risks of not seeking further care. Give reasonable notice and be available for emergency care. Regulatory bodies want to ensure there is no interruption in care and promote continuity of care. Therefore, it is crucial to inform the patient you are dismissing of a timeline during which they may seek emergency care at the clinic. Some provinces mandate specific timelines. For instance, in Ontario, the requirement is at least 30 days for emergency care, whereas the dental regulatory authority in British Columbia requires at least 60 days. Timelines may vary depending on whether you are a general practitioner or specialist. Consider your location, availability, and the ease of finding a new practitioner to determine whether it would be prudent to offer more than the minimum time requirement. Support the patient in finding a new dentist. Help the patient find a provider who can assist with their current oral healthcare needs, or direct them to a dental association that can help locate a dentist accepting new patients in the area. Offer copies of the patient's records. Inform the patient that upon their request, you will send copies of their clinical notes and records to their new dentist(s). As always, be sure to document any requests to release copies of records or radiographs. While you may be permitted to charge for these copies, evaluate the situation and consider offering to send these copies free of charge. Review outstanding balances. You can discuss any financial balances the patient may still owe, or you may waive the patient's outstanding fees as a gesture of goodwill. Each situation is unique, and your decision will depend on a number of factors such as the success of treatment provided, the financial situation of the patient, the underlying reason for dismissal, and the patient's history with the clinic. Avoid any further contact. Following the termination date, it is critical to inform staff not to schedule further appointments with the dismissed patient. Where patients have exhibited or threatened violence, office personnel should develop protocols to manage unexpected patient visits, especially if there is a potential safety risk. Once the timeline for emergency care has ended, and the patient is fully dismissed from the office, the dentist is under no obligation to accept the patient back into the office for future care. Unfortunately, not all dismissals go as smoothly as we hope. Should there be a complaint or a lawsuit, seek advice from your provincial professional liability provider, your lawyer, or a more seasoned practitioner. Oral Health welcomes this original article. About the Authors Kiran Madhesha is a licensed lawyer with the Law Society of Ontario and works as a Legal Advisor at dentalcorp of the Compliance team. Kiran holds a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of Liverpool and a Master of Laws degree with a concentration in Health Law from the University of Toronto. Kristy Platatzke is an experienced quality and compliance professional with over 13 years of experience in regulated healthcare industries, from pharmaceuticals manufacturing and specialty pharmacy to acute care. She currently holds the position of Risk and Compliance Officer at dentalcorp. Kristy holds a Master of Science in Healthcare Quality from Queen's University. RELATED ARTICLE: What You Don't Know Will Hurt You A positive and professional relationship between a patient and their dentist is critical to the success of diagnosis and treatment. We have produced a Practice Advisory on Maintaining a Professional Patient-Dentist Relationship which offers guidance to dentists. Dentists have an obligation to develop, maintain and foster a successful relationship with their patient. This can be achieved with good communication skills, making efforts to understand the patient's point of view and providing accessibility accommodations. When best practices are followed, patients are more likely to collaborate with their dentist and follow instructions. Ideally, the patient and the dentist respect each other; mutual respect and excellent communication will always provide the best results, including timely access to care and continuity of care. There is a power imbalance between a patient and dentist: the dentist has knowledge, experience and expertise that the patient does not. Dentists have a responsibility to provide their best advice, in a clear manner that is easily understood by the patient and enables patients to make decisions about their dental care that best meet their needs. From time to time, challenges may arise in the dentist-patient relationship. We expect dentists to make a concerted effort to solve problems and rebuild relationships. If those efforts fail, a formal and respectful process must be followed to end the relationship must be followed. Dismissing a Patient If the dentist-patient relationship is no longer co-operative and trusting, or if it becomes antagonistic, it may be best for the parties to go their separate ways. If a dentist feels that dismissal is the best option, the patient should be notified formally, preferably in writing. Any discussion with the patient about dismissal should be handled personally by the dentist. Letters should be sent by the dentist or in the dentist's name. Sample Dismissal Letter Dear [PATIENT NAME], It has become clear that our patient-dentist relationship has broken down. I am writing today to tell you that I am no longer able to be your dentist. We have had several discussions about your concerns about your existing amalgam (silver) restorations (fillings). You have asked me to remove them and replace them with composite (white) restorations. I have explained to you that your existing restorations do not need to be replaced at this time: there is no decay under the restorations and the restorations are in good condition. I have also explained to you that there are no health risks associated with amalgam restorations, that any symptoms you have reported are unrelated to your existing restorations, and that replacing these restorations would increase the risk of sensitivity and need for further treatment in the future. Despite these discussions, you continue to insist that I replace your amalgam restorations, and you have expressed doubts about my clinical knowledge. Our discussions have led me to believe that you have lost trust in me as your dentist. As a result I have concluded that it is time for us to go our separate ways. I recommend that you continue to attend for dental hygiene (cleaning) appointments every six months. Dental conditions do change and issues that arise tend to worsen over time if they are not addressed. I would be happy to discuss your case with your new dentist and will provide copies of your records at your written request. If you need help finding a new dentist, you can seek recommendations from friends, family members or your physician. Until you find a new dentist, I will be available to you on an emergency basis. If you prefer, I will help you make emergency arrangements at another dental office. I appreciate the opportunity to have been your dentist. With all best wishes for the future. [DENTIST'S NAME] Patient dismissals are never taken lightly in the dental community, as saying goodbye to a patient isn't just about crossing off a name on a list. It's more than verbally declining to schedule any more appointments for them. It's a careful balancing act between ethical considerations and legal requirements to maintain the integrity of the dentist-patient relationship. Practices must also be mindful of avoiding patient abandonment. 3 of the top reasons your practice may consider a patient for dismissal: - Financial non-compliance, including failure to adhere to payment agreements- Multiple violations of your written appointment cancellation policy - Hostile behavior towards dental staff Before taking dismissal action, however, the following should be considered, as patient dismissal will be a last resort: Have you provided, or attempted to provide, clear reasoning, and/or a warning to the patient before taking action? If the reason is financial, or due to your cancellation policy, do you have signed informed consents from the patient that outline these office policies? Have you documented internally what has led to the necessity for the termination, and how you conveyed it to the patient? Does the patient have pending treatment, or are they in pain? This doesn't mean completing an entire treatment plan. For instance, it's wise to finalize procedures like cementing a crown, addressing symptomatic teeth, or fitting permanent dentures. If a patient is in severe pain, or facing a life-threatening condition, it might not be the appropriate time to dismiss them. To execute this termination ethically, a certified letter serves as a formal notification. This letter, drafted with clarity and professionalism, specifies the termination date and provides a transparent explanation for the decision. It also outlines emergency protocols, communicates the patient's current dental status, treatment recommendations, and the risks associated with discontinuing care. Additionally, it facilitates the transfer of dental records, offers guidance on seeking alternative dental care, and addresses any outstanding financial obligations. Store a copy of the dismissal letter, and proof they received it in their chart. It's imperative to ensure that the termination of the dentist-patient relationship is not based on discriminatory grounds, such as age, race, or disability. Transparency is key, particularly when temporary dental restorations are involved, to mitigate potential risks and ensure patient understanding. Patient abandonment laws can vary state to state - ensure you know and understand your informative and treatment obligations. Oftentimes - with great conflict resolution and trained staff, non-violent incidents that motivate a dental practice team to consider dismissing a patient can be diffused, and the relationship salvaged. Good treatment planning and treatment case presentation can prevent account balance issues. A dentist's main obligation to a patient is to provide complete and competent dental care. However, dentists do have discretion regarding the patients they choose to accept in their practice. Dentists also have the autonomy to terminate an existing dentist-patient relationship. Yet, the termination of a dentist-patient relationship presents difficult issues, and a dentist must carefully follow the appropriate procedures for termination of the relationship. When considering the termination of a dentist-patient relationship, a dentist should consult with his or her attorney to determine the proper procedure for termination of the relationship, which may vary depending on state law. The termination of a dentist-patient relationship is legally justified when both parties agree to end it (such as when the patient's dental insurance plan changes and the current dentist is not a member of the plan or when the patient moves out of town). Another legally justified termination occurs when a course of treatment is completed. In this case, however, the patient should be made aware of the fact that the treatment has been completed. Another example of a legally justified termination occurs when the patient decides to terminate the relationship unilaterally, typically over either unhappiness with the results of the treatment or over administrative, management or personality conflicts. Abandonment The type of termination that causes dentists to have potential legal challenges occurs when a dentist decides to unilaterally terminate the dentist-patient relationship. One of the biggest areas of concern when a dentist decides to terminate a patient relationship is abandonment. Abandonment occurs when a dentist terminates a patient relationship without giving the patient adequate notice or time to locate another practitioner. Abandonment issues generally will not arise when a dentist properly dismisses a patient from his or her practice. However, abandonment may occur when a dentist refuses to complete a patient's treatment for no justified reason or when a dentist refuses to see a patient for a follow-up visit. Abandonment is difficult for the patient to prove if a dentist follows the proper and required steps in order to terminate the dentist-patient relationship. How to terminate the relationship Any dentist contemplating the termination of a dentist-patient relationship should notify the patient of the dentist's intention to terminate the relationship. A letter should be sent to the patient by certified mail with a return receipt requested, which informs the patient of the reasons that the dentist-patient relationship is being terminated. A copy of the termination letter should always be kept in the patient's file. The patient's five obligations A dentist may unilaterally terminate a patient relationship if the patient has breached one of the five obligations that he or she may owe to the dentist. The first obligation owed by a patient is to follow the dentist's instructions and to cooperate in his or her own care. Second, the patient has the obligation to keep scheduled appointments. Third, the patient is obligated to compensate the dentist for any, and all, professional services rendered. Fourth, the dentist-patient relationship may be terminated if the patient is (or was) disruptive or abusive to the office staff or even to other patients in the office. Finally, the patient has breached his or her obligations to the dentist if he or she withheld information regarding his or her medical status or history. The terminating dentist should provide the patient with adequate time in order to seek alternative care if the patient still requires continued care. The dentist should provide a specific timeframe, often defined by state law, during which the patient should seek a new dentist, such as 30 days. This timeframe may vary depending on whether the dentist is a generalist or specialist, as well as on the availability of other practitioners in the area. During this timeframe, the dentist should be available for emergency care. A dentist is not required to make a specific recommendation to a subsequent treatment provider. The dentist is only responsible for helping the patient find a subsequent provider if the patient requests it. It is sufficient for the dentist to refer the patient to a local dental society for a referral. It is also sufficient to simply provide the patient with a copy of the Yellow Pages listing of local dentists. The only restriction on patient referrals imposed on the dentist is that a dentist should not refer a patient to a subsequent provider if the dentist knows that the subsequent provider is not qualified to satisfy the patient's needs. Finally, the dentist should inform the patient that, upon request, a copy of his or her records will be forwarded to him or her or to a subsequent treatment practitioner. It is important to note that HIPAA compliance must be considered and followed regarding the transfer of any patient file. Legally, while it may be acceptable to charge the patient a fee for the copy of his or her records, it may not be prudent in this situation, and may give the patient grounds to consider retaliating by filing a complaint with the local dental board. After patient termination The office staff of a dental practice should be fully aware that a particular dentist-patient relationship has been terminated. Office staff must be aware that an appointment should not be scheduled for a particular patient after the specified termination date. In addition, if a potential subsequent treatment dentist contacts a dental office in order to ascertain the reason behind the patient seeking a new dentist, office staff must be trained how to properly handle the discussion. No member of the dental staff should malign the patient, as this might interfere with the formation of a new dentist-patient relationship. A member of the office staff, preferably the office manager or the treating dentist, should merely state that there were administrative differences to which the treating dentist and the patient could not agree upon. Once a patient has been dismissed from a practice, the patient should not be accepted back to the practice. Dentists should understand that there are exceptions that apply to terminating a patient relationship. The decision to terminate a patient relationship must not be discriminatory. In addition, a dentist should not dismiss a patient who is bleeding profusely, in excruciating pain, suffering from major swelling or in a life-threatening situation. Dentists do have the right to discontinue ongoing treatment if, in their best clinical judgment, the patient's best interests are served by doing so. This can be accomplished without the risk of having abandoned the patient. When a dentist discontinues treatment, the patient still remains a patient of the practice and should be able to seek further treatment at any time. The patient must consent to the discontinuation of treatment. However, if the patient refuses to consent, the dentist has the option of legally terminating the dentist-patient relationship based on the patient's failure to follow the dentist's medical advice and to cooperate in their own care. The obligations and duties of both dentists and patients must be understood within the dentist-patient relationship. Understanding the significance and ramifications of these duties and how and when to properly terminate a patient will minimize the risk of being sued by the patient or having a patient file a complaint with the local dental board. Pop quiz: Do you know — right now — the biggest pulse points affecting your business in 2014? If your answer is "Sure, I can figure that out ... Any established dental practice has thousands or tens of thousands of patient records. These active and inactive patients are ready and waiting to be ... Patient-centric care has been pervasive across health systems in the United States during the last several years (Epstein, Lesser and Levinson, 2010). The ... The clock is ticking. In 2025, your website is your front desk, your waiting room and your first impression. If your site is more than four years old — ... ATLNTA, Ga., USA: Getting patients to accept treatment plans can sometimes be a tricky proposition. But thanks to a new e-book, "Increasing Production..." Wow, what a fast, fun-filled year and a half it has been since incorporating E4D CAD/CAM dentistry into my practice. I can say without a doubt that I ... We hear about it a lot these days — dental practices getting squeezed by lower consumer spending. The result is less treatment acceptance and lower ... For decades, dentists around the world have profited from high demand for dental clinics by selling to a dental support organization (DSO), entering ... I bet when you first glanced at the title of this article, you might think... "Hygiene, relationship marketing? Help me connect the dots." ... NEW YORK, N.Y., USA: An orthodontic practice management leader, Ortho2, has announced the release of Practice Connect, a new, office-specific app that ... Prof. Dr. Diana Wolff Dr. Roberto Fornara Dr. Yerko Leighton Fuentealba Prof. Dr. med. dent. Michael M. Bornstein Dr. Abid Faqir, Dr. Mona Eide Gast Dr. Luca Gobatto Prof. Gianluca Gambarini MD, DDS