

## REVIEW ARTICLE

**ETHICS IN DENTISTRY: A REVIEW**

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**Abstract**

This article sheds light on a professional code of ethics to guide the responsible behavior of its members. In dentistry, many Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional conduct have been developed by the Dental Councils to express the obligations and duties of dentists towards patients, their colleagues and society as a whole. In spite of the set codes of ethics, the dentists face the dilemmas in fulfilling their duties and obligations. Hence they tend to flout all norms and guidelines due to which the entire profession may suffer. (2018, Vol. 02; Issue 01: Page 48 - 51)

**Keywords:** Ethics, Philosophy, Dental community.

**Introduction**

“Ethics” derived from Greek word “Ethos”; meaning custom or character. Ethics or moral philosophy is a branch of philosophy that involves systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct (1).

The purpose of Dental Ethics is to heighten ethical and professional responsibility, promote ethical conduct and professionalism in dentistry, advance dialogue on ethical issues and stimulate reflection on common ethical problems in dental practice. Dental Ethics makes available courses, activities and resources

in dental ethics and professionalism to the dental community (2).

The dental profession and the individual dentist have a duty to recognize the reciprocity of the relationship that exists with society and the duty of covenantal fidelity. The dentist has a duty to conduct his or her professional life in accordance with the ethical principles rooted in the moral rules (3).

**Historical background**

1900BC- The code of Hammurabi (Babylonian medicine 1900BC) - First known legal code.

1000BC- Around 1000BC India produced the Vedas. The Upanishads which were the expanded versions of Vedas are known for their discourse on many problems such as ethics, god, death and immortality.

400BC- The "Hippocratic oath" (Greek medicine 400BC) - It clearly stated that the doctor is there for the benefit of his patients, to the best of his ability he must do them good and nothing which he knows will cause harm (4).

1964 - Helsinki Declaration

1976 - The dentists (code of ethics) Regulations – DCI (Ethical Rules for Dentists) (5).

## Doctor – patient relationship

The dentist – patient relationship is based on trust. Patient relationship begins at that moment only when dentist expresses a professional opinion to an individual that he accepts also. Now-a-days unexpectedly there is a falling down of doctor patient relationship. The End of doctor- patient relationship may be different reason but it can be explain through an "express term" - one in which both the parties are in agreement.

Agreement may or may not be written. It Contents: Fee – structure, Treatment plan, Manner of payment and Guarantees made by dentist. But 'A dentist should never guarantee a result!'.

## Ethical vs legal

Misconceptions sometimes occur whether a problem is ethical or illegal in nature. 'Legal': The goals of law with respect to dental practice show values of society and profession so that the most satisfactory treatment is provided. 'Ethics': They are the norms that dictate morality in the profession.

But attitude towards the health care is changing within the society. Instead of law as a guide for providing treatment, which is in interest of patients, Dentists consider law in preventing themselves against mal- practices (6).

## International ethical principles

Whenever there is professional dilemma, ethical reasoning takes the stand for decision making. The major principles are: (5, 6)

- To do no harm (non- maleficence).
- To do well (beneficence).
- Respect for others.
- Justice.
- Veracity or truthfulness.
- Confidentiality.

## Duties and obligations of a dentist

Duties and obligations of a dentist are towards (5)

1. Patient /population
2. The profession/ professional colleagues
3. The society.

1. Duties and obligations of a dentist towards patients:-

- Every dentist should be courteous, sympathetic, friendly and helpful.
- He should be punctual in fulfilling his appointments.
- The dentist should not permit considerations of religion, nationality, race, party politics or social standing to interfere between his duties and his patients.
- Information of personal nature which may be gained directly from patient during his/her treatment should be kept in utmost confidence.

2. Duties and obligations of a dentist towards colleagues:-

- Every dentist should cherish a proper pride in his or her colleague and should not criticize them either by actions, words or deeds.

- If a dentist is consulted by the patient of another dentist and the former finds that the patient is suffering from previous faulty treatment, it is his duty to correct it at once without any comments about the previous dentist.

3. Duties and obligations of a dentist towards society-

- The dentist has to assume leadership in the community on matters pertaining to dental health.

- People should be urged to seek care without influencing the choice of dentist.

- Ethics rules for dentists also given by Dental council of India.

## Duties and obligations towards the public (police and law courts) (7, 8)

- A dentist is not bound to disclose professional secrets unless called upon by the magistrate or judge to do so.

- Knowledge of patient gained in the course of examination and treatment is privileged and should not be disclosed without the consent of the patient or an order from presiding judge in the Court of Law.

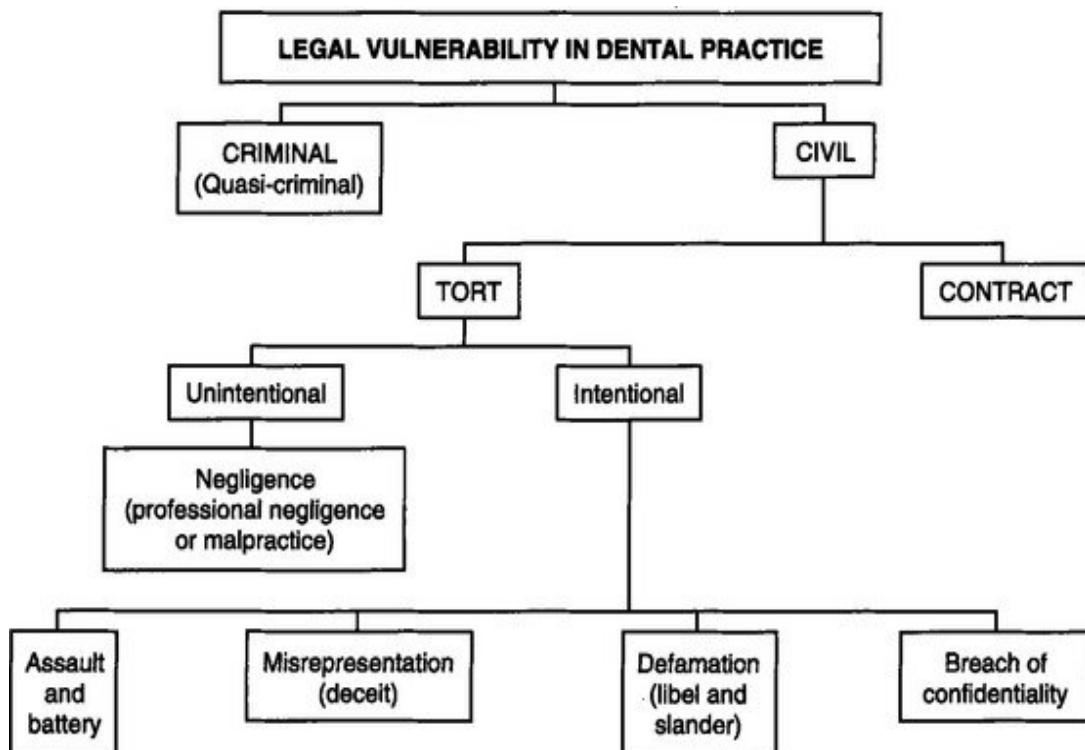


Fig 1: Legal Vulnerability in Dental Practice

## Conclusion

It should be remembered that a profession exists as long as it enjoys the trust of the society and this can be assured by always placing the interest of the patient

above one's own interest. Most of the practitioners are unaware of the ethical obligations in their day to day practice, so it is recommended that dental ethics should be included and emphasized

upon, in curriculum. CDE programs on ethical practice should be regularly conducted for dental practitioners by the respective associations. Moreover, the regulatory bodies should be stringent during their monitoring processes and take necessary actions over the unethical practices.

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