

Talking Ethics



Professional Evolution Mandates Interprofessional Collaboration

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Our profession has earned the trust and respect of the “multicultural, multigendered public” (my phrase) and the allied health care professionals, due to our Process of Care, diligent oral and overall health education, and health promotion competence.

The well-documented link between oral health and overall health mandates that dental hygienists collaborate interprofessionally and be responsible for developing and maintaining professional relationships with other health care providers to ensure optimal client care outcomes, safe practices, mutual respect, and trust.¹ The *Entry-to-Practice Canadian Competencies for Dental Hygienists* states that graduates are integral members of the health care team who collaborate with oral health professionals and others to provide safe, effective, and ethical approaches to care.²



This issue of *Oh Canada!* examines interprofessional collaboration and medical–dental integration. The Alberta College of Dental Hygienists defines the verb collaborate as, “To work in partnership with the patient and or others while maintaining a focus on the needs and goals of the patient. Collaboration may include consultations, referrals or other relationships that benefit the patient.”³ The British Columbia College of Oral Health Professionals adds, “the dental hygienist works with the client, other members of the dental team and society in general, to achieve and maintain optimal oral health as an essential aspect of well-being.”⁴ The College of Dental Hygienists of Nova Scotia states, in the context of contraindications, “the member must work collaboratively with the client’s health care provider/team to determine the optimal sequencing of dental hygiene care and to ensure that the client’s oral health needs are met safely and appropriately.”^{5 p7}

PRACTICALLY SPEAKING

Interprofessional collaborative activities include consultations and clinically appropriate referrals for assessment, diagnosis or treatment by another health professional.³ Obtaining consent or withdrawal of consent from the client or their substitute decision maker requires documentation in the client record. The College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario’s expanded list of substitute decision makers includes, from the highest to the lowest: guardian of the person appointed by the courts; attorney for personal care conferred by a written document when the client was capable; consent and capacity board-appointed representative; spouse or partner; child or custodial parent; access parent; brother or sister; any other relative; or public guardian and trustee.⁶

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Professional Evolution Mandates Interprofessional Collaboration...cont'd

LEGALLY SPEAKING

A client's personal private health information must be safeguarded according to the federal *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act*⁷ and specific provincial privacy legislation. Privacy legislation at the provincial and territorial levels interprets sharing personal health information in two distinct ways:

1. Those health care professionals who **need to know**: only those health care providers who have a legitimate reason to view someone's personal health information are able to see the information⁷ (example in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Nunavut, PEI, Saskatchewan)
2. Those health care professionals within the client's **circle of care**: this term is commonly used to describe the ability of certain health information custodians to assume an individual's implied consent to collect, use or disclose personal health information for the purpose of providing health care⁸ (example in Manitoba, New Brunswick, Ontario, Québec)

Clarity can be obtained by consulting the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada's website⁹ and viewing the "PIPEDA and your business: What you need to know about protecting your customers' privacy" four-minute video.¹⁰

ETHICALLY SPEAKING



The *Dental Hygienists' Code of Ethics* articulates the knowledge, skill, and judgement expected of dental hygienists in Canada; the public has access to this commitment our profession strives to keep. The ethical principle, **autonomy**, pertains to the right of the client to make their own choices. The dental hygienist communicates relevant information openly and truthfully to assist the

client in making informed choices and participating actively in achieving and maintaining their optimal oral health.¹¹ The ethical principle, **confidentiality**, is the duty to hold secret any information acquired from the professional relationship and includes the responsibility to obtain a client's consent to use or share their information.¹⁰ Members who find themselves facing an ethical dilemma or in need of support to make an ethical decision can consult "Appendix B: Guidelines for ethical decision making" in the code.¹¹



PROFESSIONALLY SPEAKING

Our national organizations have analysed the needs of the public and the profession. The Federation of Dental Hygiene Regulators of Canada has created new expanding competencies for entry-to-practice graduates that will become the standards for the profession in the very near future.

The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association has created an ambitious educational itinerary for its Practice 360 national conference, taking place in October. The keynote address by Sarah McVanel, MSc, CHRL, from Greatness Magnified will help us become more decisive, confident, and action-oriented professionals. Specifically related to interprofessional collaboration, Dr. Tim Donley, periodontist and international lecturer, will present a session on collaborating with medical professionals in a busy dental practice.¹² Both sessions and the entire program will increase our knowledge and provide us with vision and confidence to embrace our evolving profession.

What's your next step towards the implementation of interprofessional collaboration and medical-dental integration in your practice? Are you looking for opportunities to discuss the options available to our profession? Consider registering for the Practice 360 national conference, October 17–19, 2024. If you do, I'll see you there!



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