

Christian Dentist's Oath

With gratitude to God, faith in Christ Jesus, and dependence on the Holy Spirit, I publicly profess my intent to practice dentistry according to the highest Biblical and professional standards for the glory of God.

With humility, I will seek to increase my skills, and I will respect those who teach me and who broaden my knowledge. In turn, I will freely impart my knowledge and wisdom to others.

With God's help, I will love those who come to me for healing and comfort. I will honor and care for each patient as a person made in the image of God, striving to put aside selfish interests.

With God's guidance, I will endeavor to be a good steward of my skills and of society's resources. I will convey God's love in my relationships with family, friends, and community. I will aspire to reflect God's loving kindness in caring for those in need.

With God's grace, I will live according to this profession.

*Approved by the House of Delegates
May 3, 1991. Chicago, Illinois.*

*Amended by the House of Delegates
June 11, 2003. Schroon Lake, New York.*

Explanation

The modern dental profession has developed in the Hippocratic tradition. Dental professionals have a long history of interest in and concern for matters of ethics in the practice of dentistry (1), and they often look to the Hippocratic Oath as a standard for conduct. (2) The first American Dental Association Code was adopted in 1866. Major changes were made in 1922 and again in 1951 when it became the Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct. This 1951 document has undergone periodic revisions, the most recent being in 1992. (3)

The professions of medicine and dentistry have many common features in training and practice, and also share the fundamental precept of seeking the best interests of the patient. This commonality led to the inclusion of dental students and clinicians in the Christian Medical Society, and the subsequent name change to the Christian Medical and Dental Society. These shared professional features and, more importantly, the shared faith in Jesus Christ led the Ethics Commission to propose a Christian Dentist's Oath which closely parallels the Christian Physician's Oath. It was adopted by the CMDS House of Delegates in 1991.

1. Ring ME. A history of ethics in dentistry. *New York State Dental Journal* 1994; 60(1):40-46
2. Mitis FJ. Hippocrates in the golden age: his life, his work and his contributions to dentistry. *Journal of the American College of Dentists* 1991; 58(1):26-30
3. Principles of ethics and code of professional conduct with official advisory opinions revised to May 1992. *Journal of the American Dental Association* 1992; 123(9):98-110

Abstracts

"Clinical Dental Ethics: Defining an Ethic for Practicing Professionals" by Mark Siegler and David L. Schiedermayer. *Journal of the American College of Dentists* 1988;55(4):4-9

Physicians and dentists share similar scientific backgrounds, pursue similar treatment goals, and confront similar moral dilemmas in the day-to-day care of patients. An ethic for practicing professionals must focus on the act of clinical decision-making with and in the interest of the patient. Clinical ethics offers a useful and practical way for medical and dental professionals to integrate clinical experience with teaching, research, and practice activities. Because of their technical knowledge and involvement with patients, physicians and dentists are in the best position to practice and teach clinical ethics.

"Ethics for the Practicing Dentist" by David T. Ozar. J Am Coll Dent 1991;58(1):4,6-9

The author, a philosopher who has worked extensively in dental ethics, begins with three assumptions: (a) to be a member of a profession means that one has undertaken certain obligations; (b) dentistry is a profession; (c) the content of a profession is the product of a dialogue between the profession and the larger community, and this dialogue is subtle, complex and ongoing.

He then presents seven categories of professional obligation for dentists: (1) the chief client is the patient; (2) the relationship between professional and patient---four models are offered and discussed, the Commercial Model, the Guild Model, the Agent Model, and the Interactive Model; (3) a hierarchy of central values---life and general health, oral health, autonomy, preferred pattern of practice on the part of the dentist, aesthetic considerations, considerations of cost and efficiency; (4) competence; (5) the priority of the client's wellbeing, including sacrifices the dentist should be willing to make; (6) relations with co-professionals; and (7) relations between the profession and the larger community.

Bibliography

The April 1985 issue of the Journal of Dental Education (vol 49, no 4) was devoted to ethical issues in dentistry and includes 7 articles plus a large bibliography.

The Fall 1990 issue of the Journal of the American Dental Association (vol 57, no 3) includes 7 articles on ethical issues in contemporary dentistry.

Weinstein BD. Dental Ethics. Philadelphia: Lea and Febiger, 1993

This book on dental ethics has 24 contributors and is divided into three sections. The first establishes an ethical framework using principlism. The second addresses several specific clinical issues faced by practicing dentists. The third includes long case studies. The book concludes with appendices with the ADA Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct (1992 update) and an extensive bibliography with over 650 references.

Rule JT, Veatch RM. Ethical Questions in Dentistry. Chicago: Quintessence Pub. Co., 1993

This book is co-authored by a dentist and a philosopher. It also has three sections on "Ethical Questions: Theory and Principles", "General Principles in Dental Ethics", and "Case Studies of Special Problems".

Ozar DT, Sokol D. Dental Ethics at Chairside: Professional Principles and Practical Applications. St. Louis: Mosby, 1994