

# American College of Dentists

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## Core Values & Aspirational Code of Ethics

### Standards of Ethical Conduct

The dental profession has long subscribed to a body of ethical statements developed primarily for the benefit of the patient. As a member of the profession, a Fellow must recognize responsibility not only to patients but also to society, to other health professionals and to self. The following are not laws but standards of conduct which define the essentials of honorable behavior for a Fellow in the American College of Dentists.

1. A Fellow shall be dedicated to providing competent oral health service with compassion and respect for human dignity.
2. Fellow shall be honest with patients and colleagues and appropriately report those who are deemed to be incompetent or engaged in fraud or deception.
3. A Fellow shall respect the rights of patients, colleagues, other health professionals, and society.
4. A Fellow shall continue to study, apply, and seek truth in the advancement of scientific knowledge and to make relevant information available to patients, colleagues, and society.
5. A Fellow shall responsibly participate in activities contributing to an improved community, profession, and society.
6. A Fellow shall act in a fair, just, and equitable manner.
7. A Fellow shall possess personal and professional integrity and act as a trustworthy and responsible citizen.

### Core Values

The core values represent a guide for ethical behavior for Fellows of the ACD and are the foundation from which the principles are derived. The core values collectively reflect the character, charter, and mission of the ACD. The ACD identifies the following as core values (in alphabetical order):

#### Autonomy

Patients have the right to determine what should be done with their own bodies. Because patients are moral entities they are capable of autonomous decision-making. Respect for patient autonomy affirms this dynamic in the doctor-patient relationship and forms the foundation for informed consent, for protecting patient confidentiality, and for upholding veracity. The patient's right to self-determination is not, however, absolute. The dentist must also weigh benefits and harms and inform the patient of contemporary standards of oral health care.

#### Beneficence

Beneficence, often cited as a fundamental principle of ethics, is the obligation to benefit others or to seek their good. While balancing harms and benefits, the dentist seeks to minimize harms and maximize benefits for the patient. The dentist refrains from harming the patient by referring to those with specialized expertise when the dentist's own skills are insufficient.

#### Compassion

Compassion requires caring and the ability to identify with the patient's overall well-being. Relieving pain and suffering is a common attribute of dental practice. Acts of kindness and a sympathetic ear for the patient are all qualities of a caring, compassionate dentist.

#### Competence

The competent dentist is able to diagnose and treat the patient's oral health needs and to refer when it is in the patient's best interest. Maintaining competence requires continual self-assessment about the outcome of patient care and involves a commitment to lifelong learning. Competence is the just expectation of the patient.

#### Integrity

Integrity requires the dentist to behave with honor and decency. The dentist who practices with a sense of integrity affirms the core values and recognizes when words, actions or intentions are in conflict with one's values and conscience. Professional integrity commits the dentist to upholding the professions' Codes of Ethics and to safeguarding, influencing and promoting the highest professional standards.

## **Justice**

Justice is often associated with fairness or giving to each his or her own due. Issues of fairness are pervasive in dental practice and range from elemental procedural issues such as who shall receive treatment first, to complex questions of who shall receive treatment at all. The just dentist must be aware of these complexities when balancing the distribution of benefits and burdens in practice.

## **Professionalism**

Self-governance is a hallmark of a profession and dentistry will thrive as long as its members are committed to actively support and promote the profession and its service to the public. The commitment to promoting oral health initiatives and protecting the public requires that the profession work together for the collective best interest of society.

## **Tolerance**

Dentists are challenged to practice within an increasingly complex cultural and ethnically diverse community. Conventional attitudes regarding pain, appropriate function, and esthetics may be confounded by these differences. Tolerance to diversity requires dentists to recognize that these differences exist and challenges dentists to understand how these differences may affect patient choices and treatment.

## **Veracity**

Veracity, often known as honesty or truth telling, is the bedrock of a trusting doctor-patient relationship. The dentist relies on the honesty of the patient to gather the facts necessary to form a proper diagnosis. The patient relies on the dentist to be truthful so that truly informed decision-making can occur. Honesty in dealing with the public, colleagues and self are equally important.

## **Aspirational Statements of the Core Values**

The central aspiration of the American College of Dentists is that all members practice their profession in an ethical manner. The American College of Dentists identifies the following as aspirational statements of the core values (in alphabetical order):

### **Autonomy**

A Fellow of the ACD recognizes the dignity and intrinsic worth of individuals and their right to make personal choices.

### **Beneficence**

A Fellow of the ACD acts in the best interests of patients and society even when there is conflict with the dentist's personal self-interest.

### **Compassion**

A Fellow of the ACD is sensitive to, and empathizes with, individual and societal needs for comfort and help.

### **Competence**

A Fellow of the ACD strives to achieve the highest level of knowledge, skill, and ability within his or her capacity.

### **Integrity**

A Fellow of the ACD incorporates the core values as the basis for ethical practice and the foundation for honorable character.

### **Justice**

A Fellow of the ACD treats all individuals and groups in a fair and equitable manner and promotes justice in society.

### **Professionalism**

A Fellow of the ACD is committed to involvement in professional endeavors that enhance knowledge, skill, judgment, and intellectual development for the benefit of society.

### **Tolerance**

A Fellow of the ACD respects the rights of individuals to hold disparate views in ethics discourse and dialogue and recognizes these views may arise from diverse personal, ethnic, or cultural norms.

### **Veracity**

A Fellow of the ACD values truthfulness as the basis for trust in personal and professional relationships.