

Respecting patients' dignity and choices  
- the importance of treating patients with dignity and respect, being non-discriminatory and recognising the patient's responsibility for making decisions, giving them all the information they need to make decisions

Protecting patients' confidential information  
- the need to treat information about patients as confidential, using it only for the purposes for which it was given.

Dental professionals should also take steps to prevent accidental disclosure or unauthorised access to confidential information by keeping information secure at all times  
- in some limited circumstances disclosure of confidential patient information without consent may be justified in the public interest (for example to assist in the prevention or detection of a serious crime) or may be required by law or by Court order  
- dental professionals should seek appropriate advice before disclosing information on this basis

Co-operating with other members of the dental team and other healthcare colleagues in the interests of the patients  
- dental professionals should work co-operatively with colleagues and respect their role in the care of patients  
- dental professionals should also treat colleagues fairly and without discrimination and communicate effectively and share knowledge and skills as necessary, in the interest of the patient

Maintaining your professional knowledge and competence  
- dental professionals should make sure that they keep their knowledge, skills and professional performance under continuous review and identify and understand their

limitations as well strengths  
- dental professionals should make themselves aware of best practice in the fields that they work and provide a good standard of care based on available contemporary evidence and authoritative guidance  
- they should also make themselves aware of laws and regulations, which affect their work, premises, equipment and businesses, and comply with them

Being trustworthy  
- dental professionals should make sure that they justify the trust placed in them by their patients, the public and colleagues by acting honestly and fairly in all their professional and personal dealings.'

These standards are supplemented by six more booklets also available from directly the GDC and included on the website:

- Principles of patient consent
- Principles of patient confidentiality
- Principles of dental team working
- Principles of handling complaints
- Principles of raising concerns
- Scope of practice (the most recent release – 2009).

In the rest of this series we will look at each of these issues in greater depth, using a variety of cases to illustrate how the principles apply in practice. In the next two articles we will discuss two key areas, consent and confidentiality. Knowledge and understanding of the principles and practice of dental ethics and law will provide reassurance that you always practise in a professional way, and will help to ensure that you can avoid some of the pitfalls which exist in practice.

#### Further reading

Brennan M G, Oliver R G, Harvey B D, Jones G. *Ethics and law for the dental team*. Pastest, 2006.

General Dental Council. *Standards Guidance comprising Standards for dental professionals; Principles of patient consent; Principles of patient confidentiality; Principles of dental team working\**; *Principles of complaints handling\**; *Principles of raising concerns\**, *Scope of practice+*. GDC, 2005, \*2006 and +2009.

D'Cruz L. *Legal aspects of dental practice*. Churchill Livingstone, 2006.

Lambden P (ed). *Dental law and ethics*. Radcliffe Medical Press, 2002.

All GDC-registered DCPs who work in a clinical or laboratory environment are advised to carry out CPD in legal and ethical issues. To take part in Vital verifiable CPD and complete the questions based on this article, turn to page 55 for instructions on how to subscribe.



## HOTSPOT

**Name:** Alex(andra) Stephanie Kremer  
**Age:** 22  
**Town:** London  
**Loves:** Having fun, working (sad I know!) and cooking  
**Hates:** Spiders and bad teeth!  
**Job:** Dental Recruitment Consultant for Dental Angels

#### How did you get your job?

I went to meet Kelly Hagggett to help get me back into practice management after the backing was pulled from the company I was setting up and she had some fantastic ideas for Dental Angels and I couldn't help but get involved.

#### How did you end up working in dentistry?

I lived on my own from a very young age and needed to support myself and becoming a dental nurse gave me a career path as well as continual learning that I otherwise may not have received. I also realised early on how much I enjoyed it.

#### What do you enjoy most about your job?

Meeting lots of different people and weirdly I love doing all the back office admin and also the marketing.

#### What is the most challenging part of your job?

Dealing with unrealistic clients (but don't tell them that!)

#### Would you recommend a career in dentistry?

Definitely, there are so many directions you can take within the industry and despite what many may think it is hard work and hugely rewarding.

#### What three things could you not live without?

Music, a comfortable bed and my toothbrush.

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