Legal and Ethical Issues
Standards for Dental Care Professionals

Aims: To give an overview of the history of dentistry and dental nursing and the legal and ethical obligations of the registered dental nurse.

Learning Outcomes: By completing this verifiable CPD you will be able to:

- Describe a brief outline of the history of dentistry and dental nursing
- Identify the current registration requirements for dental nurses
- Explain why registration is important
- Differentiate between verifiable CPD and non-verifiable CPD
- Discuss the importance of maintaining written records of your CPD

Introduction

Delivery and expectations of dental care have evolved over the centuries; with delivery moving away from a more treatment based service, and towards one focused on prevention and cosmetic treatment. In addition, rather than being passive recipients to dental care, our patients often now take an active role in their treatment and could be considered to have increased expectations over the treatment that they receive from the professionals involved in their care.

This verifiable CPD article will provide an outline of the history of dentistry and dental nursing and outline the GDC standards that all dental professionals are expected to adhere to in order to maintain their professional standards. Each year Cpd4dentalnurses will cover articles on legal and ethical issue and complaint handling to ensure that you continue to keep up to date with these important issues.

Brief History of Dentistry
Medicine and surgery were initially practised by monks, and assisted by barbers, until the pope decreed in 1163, that members of religious orders should not let blood.\(^3\)

In the 16\(^{th}\) and 17\(^{th}\) Centuries, medicine divided into three strands.\(^4\) Barbers shaved, cut hair and pulled teeth and barber surgeons let blood and carried out dentistry and surgery.

During the 18\(^{th}\) and 19\(^{th}\) centuries, surgeons broke away and formed the London Company of Surgeons which later became the Royal College of Surgeons. The establishment of the Medical register which did not include dentists was established by the Medical Act in 1859\(^5\) and following this the Dentists Act set up a dental register run by the General Medical Council which required all new entrants to have the Licentiate in Dental Surgery. In 1921 the Dentists Act formed the Dental Board of the UK to administer the register and in 1958 the GDC was established which finally divorced the “control of dentistry from the rest of medicine”.\(^6\)

**Brief History of Dental Nurses**

During the 19\(^{th}\) century the first female assistants were employed as “ladies in attendance.” Their duties included chair side assistance, instrument cleaning, inventory and reception.

In 1910 the first formal training program for dental nurses was started in Ohio at the Ohio College of Dental Surgery. It was discontinued in 1914 due to the opposition of Ohio dentist.

In 1924 the American Dental Assistants Association was founded by Juliette Southard and her colleagues.\(^7\)
• In 1940 the British Dental Nurses and Assistants Association was founded by Philip Grundy from Leyland in Lancashire with the help of his dental assistants Amelia White and Madeline Winter. It is now called the British Association of Dental Nurses.

• In 1943 the Association founded the British Dental Nurses and Assistants Examining Board and the first exam was held. It is now called the National Examining Board for Dental Nurses.

• During 1948 the association continued to grow.

• During 1970-1980 dental nursing continued to become more professional.

• 1993 saw the publication of The Nuffield Report, a white paper which supported the idea of training and registration for dental nurses.

• In 1995, to prepare for statutory registration, the Training Advisory Service was formed to ensure high quality dental nurse training.

• 2008. Dental nurses have to complete a training course, qualify and register with the General Dental Council.

**Current Registration Requirements for Dental Nurses**

The requirement for dental nurses to be registered with the General Dental Council (GDC) came into effect in July 2008. Any dental nurse working in the United Kingdom (UK) needs to be registered with the GDC or if they do not have a qualification that enables them to register they must be enrolled on a course that will lead to a qualification that will enable them to register with the GDC when they have completed it.

It is now illegal to work in the UK if you are not registered with the GDC or enrolled on a course that will enable you to register when it is completed.

As GDC registrants, there is a professional requirement for dental nurses to ensure that they are indemnified for the work that they do. Some dental nurses employed by and working under the direction of a dentist may think it is enough to rely on their dentists' professional indemnity arrangements, as their employer is vicariously liable for the acts and omissions of employees. Each dental nurse must take time to decide on how the work they do will be indemnified and make an informed decision.
Why is Registration Important?

Dental nurses come under the title Dental Care Professional (DCP) and have a duty to keep their skills and knowledge up to date so that patients receive the best possible treatment. The GDC have set out standards for DCPs and all dental professionals should strive to follow them. (Future legal and ethical CPD will be provided to explain the standards in more detail).

The aims of the GDC are to:

- Protect patients
- Promote confidence in dental care professionals
- Be at the forefront of healthcare regulation

To enable them to do this they:

- Register qualified professionals
- Set standards of dental practice and conduct
- Assure the quality of dental education
- Ensure professionals keep up to date
- Help patients with complaints about a dental professional
- Work to strengthen patient protection

An overview of the Standards for DCP's

Standards exist in many parts of life, they could be personal standards that an individual tries to maintain, or ethical standards that are clearly defined and legally binding within their workplace. They often provide individuals with firm basis from which to work. Standards in dentistry are to safeguard patients.

As a DCP the GDC state you are responsible for:

- Putting patients interests first and acting to protect them
- Respecting patients dignity and choices
- Protecting the confidentiality of patients information
- Co-operating with other members of the dental team and other healthcare colleagues in the interests of patients
- Maintaining your professional knowledge and competence and
- Being trustworthy
Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

CPD could be defined as comprising of one of the following:

- Updating knowledge and skills
- Preparing for a changing work role and new responsibilities
- Increasing your competence

The GDC define CPD as ‘study, training, courses seminars, reading, and other activities undertaken by the DCP which could reasonably be expected to advance his or her professional development.

As a registered DCP you are required to carry out CPD and keep a record of it to provide the GDC.

You are required to complete 150 hours of CPD during each five year period. 50 hours of this CPD must be verifiable and 100 hours can be non-verifiable.

What is Verifiable CPD?

Verifiable CPD should have concise educational aims and objectives and clear outcomes. This means you should know what you can expect to learn by undertaking the CPD.

You should have the opportunity to give feedback to the provider of the CPD.

You should gain a certificate as proof that you have completed the CPD and the certificate should be provided by the provider or organiser of the CPD and should show how many hours CPD you have completed.

It is the responsibility of each DCP to ensure that their CPD meets these conditions.

(Verifiable CPD with Cpd4dentalnurses.co.uk always meets these conditions and we encourage our members to provide us with regular feedback so we can improve the quality of our CPD.)

What is Non-Verifiable CPD?

Non-verifiable CPD could be considered to be any activity that increases your knowledge and does not require a certificate as evidence. Examples of non-verifiable CPD are:

- Reading journals
- Taking part in dental forums
- Staff meetings
- Staff training
• Clinical audits
• Private study

What subjects can I complete my CPD in?

There are three core subjects which you must complete verifiable CPD in. These are:

1. Medical emergencies (10 hours each 5 year CPD cycle)
2. Disinfection and decontamination (5 hours each 5 year CPD cycle)
3. Radiography and radiation protection (5 hours each 5 year CPD cycle)

It is recommended that you also complete verifiable or non-verifiable CPD in legal and ethical issues and complaints handling during each 5 year cycle.

Keeping records

At the end of each year that you are registered with the GDC they will send you a renewal form for the following year and they will ask you to inform them of the hours of CPD you have completed during the year. This is a legal requirement.

You should also keep a record of the verifiable and non-verifiable CPD you have completed and the relevant certificates for verifiable CPD as documentary proof. The GDC may ask you to submit these at the end of the 5 year cycle.

Conclusion

This article has provided a history of dentistry and dental nursing which demonstrates the change in the dental profession. Dental nurses have progressed from being known as ‘ladies in waiting’ to registered dental care professionals. With this increase in status comes the obligation to abide by the legal and ethical standards outlined by the GDC and the need to commit to Continuing Professional Development in order to maintain high standards of patient care.

Non-Verifiable CPD Tip

Non-verifiable CPD is available outlining the details of scope of practice for dental nurses and further information about dental nurse indemnity insurance. Don’t forget to update your non-verifiable CPD log.
References