

Professionalism, how do we define it? As oral health professionals we are continually assessed not only on our clinical skills, patient care, interpersonal skills, knowledge base, ethical behaviour but also our professional behaviour. How we interact with peers, colleagues, patients and allied health professionals, on a day-to-day basis, is what defines the dental hygiene profession to the public and oral health community.

Each one of us is an ambassador for our profession and to that end have a moral obligation to conduct ourselves in a professional and ethical manner at all times. The International Federation of Dental Hygienists (IFDH) has developed an International Code of Ethics that defines the behaviour that is expected from the global dental hygiene profession. This code of Ethics is published in this journal.

Respect for the patient, their rights as an individual, their race, religious beliefs and above all confidentiality is paramount to professional dental hygiene practice.

Respect for colleagues and peers is also essential for maintaining a professional working relationship within our varied workplace settings.

Respect for ourselves, our personal and professional development, working environment, ergonomics and professional relationships assist us to become valuable members of the dental profession.

Professional development through a commitment to lifelong learning is an ethical responsibility for all oral health professionals. Dentistry is dynamic and it would be very easy to be 'out of touch' within a few years of graduating. How often do you see the same people at professional development days? It is a sad testament when regulating boards introduce compulsory CE points, as a provision to continued registration, to ensure the dental workforce is current and up to date.

IFDH member countries provide a strong leadership role to the dental hygiene profession in their country by developing codes of professional conduct and ethics, professional development opportunities and representation on governing boards. Through their membership to IFDH they also provide access to the vast resources of IFDH, networking via the global dental hygiene community, International Symposia on Dental Hygiene and the International Journal of Dental Hygiene.

As colleagues and oral health professionals I encourage you to conduct yourselves with honesty and integrity and to personally attain the highest level of professional practice.

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