

Code of Ethics and Standards of Professional Conduct

Interim Policy Adopted October 16, 1997

I. Introduction

The American Board of Dental Public Health defines the profession's role as follows:

...science and art of preventing and controlling dental diseases and promoting dental health through organized community efforts. It is that form of dental practice which serves the community as a patient rather than the individual. It is concerned with dental health education of the public, with applied dental research, and with the administration of group dental care programs, as well as the prevention and control of dental diseases on a community basis.

Dental public health professionals represent many talents including those required for clinicians, scientists, educators, administrators, and policy makers. Primarily however, these represent individuals who combine skills in all such fields in varying proportions or different roles and responsibilities over time. The diversity in scope of the members' roles poses a particular challenge to dental public health professionals when charged with determining an ethical stand for issues they may encounter.

A profession has the obligation to be self-regulating. Implicit to this concept of self-regulation is the notion that a profession will have a written code of ethics that provides guidance for appropriate conduct of members in their professional practice. The dilemma of choosing between an individual as a patient and that of a community requires the creation of a code that formalizes guidance for professionals forced to make those decisions. The purpose of developing these guidelines is to provide guidance to people engaged in dental public health activities, assist in the education of public health students who are new to the profession, and provide an institutional memory when faced with challenges.

Codes of ethics identify the principles that underlie professional behavior. They guide individual professionals and serve as evidence that a professional discipline is worthy of the public's trust. Codes of ethics are beliefs. Standards of professional conduct represent behavior guided by such beliefs. Professional conduct describes actions that are good and right for the community and civilization, performed without regard to concerns for personal benefit.

The American Association of Public Health Dentistry (AAPHD) includes members who voluntarily agree to uphold, abide by, and promote the AAPHD Code of Ethics and Standards of Professional Conduct. This code of ethics is aspirational, and not a legal instrument. The AAPHD Code of Ethics describes principles and beliefs inherent to the practice of a professional dedicated to improving the health of a community, thereby expanding and clarifying issues not defined in a code where the scope of practice is treatment of an individual patient.

II. Preamble

The American Association of Public Health Dentistry, directly and through its individual members, is committed to improving the oral health and general well-being of the public based on principles of public health. Association goals, strategies, policies, and services are founded in its Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. The association strives to ensure that members are dedicated to excellence in the science, art, and practice of dental public health.

Principle 1: Autonomy *("Self-governance")*

The dental public health professional has a duty to respect the rights of individuals and the organizations by which they collectively govern and express themselves.

STANDARD OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

A. RIGHT TO KNOW: Dental public health professionals have the responsibility to inform individuals and community organizations about the adverse conditions or problems known, issues involved, options available for correcting oral health problems and inequities, recommended courses of action, and the rationale for and possible side-effects of the recommendations.

B. LEADERSHIP: Dental public health professionals have the responsibility to seek out and respect the views of individual and community organizations and to facilitate health care decisions and support the course of action selected. Individuals and organizations have the right to access information supporting these policies and actions.

C. CONFIDENTIALITY: It is the responsibility of the dental public health professional to ensure that patient records in public programs do not breach individual patient confidentiality. Administrative information beyond that essential to patient care should be limited to group data.

D. DIGNITY: The dental public health professional must be sensitive to and respect individual and community customs, beliefs and other cultural variations.

Principle 2: Nonmaleficence *("Do No Harm")*

The dental public health professional has a duty to protect individuals from physical, mental, and social injury.

STANDARD OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

A. COMPETENCE: The dental public health professional has a duty to engage in professional life-long learning and skills development. The professional has a responsibility to keep abreast of developments in the scientific literature and professional discourse on professional and scientific issues. The professional has a duty to promote the application of scientific

knowledge in his or her practice.

B. REFERRAL: The dental public health professional has a duty to recognize the limits of his or her abilities, and to seek consultation and/or refer individuals and organizational representatives to more competent authority. When referral is indicated, the dental public health professional is responsible for ensuring follow-up.

C. SCOPE: Individual and community services must be provided in a socially responsible manner. The dental public health professional must respect the reputation of each individual, organization, and community.

D. RESOURCES: Dental public health professional services must be performed with respect for the value of the services received, and conservation of individual, private, and public resources.

E. PERSONAL IMPAIRMENT: It is unethical for a dental public health professional to practice when one's judgment or skill may be impaired for any reason.

Principle 3: Beneficence ("Do Good")

The dental public health professional has a duty to understand and promote individual and community health and welfare.

STANDARD OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

A. CLINICAL CARE: Clinicians are committed to helping patients who need or request health services. Resources are often a compromising factor, particularly in public programs. The dental public health professional must provide the best care possible, but with the constraint that care should be equitable—i.e., the best possible care that helps the largest number of people for the longest period of time.

B. COMMUNITY PRACTICE: The

dental public health professional has a duty to promote policies that improve oral health service resources.

C. PRIMARY CARE: The dental public health professional must cultivate independent responsibility for oral health and general well-being by individuals and communities.

Principle 4: Justice ("Fairness")

The dental public health professional has a duty to treat individuals and community organizations fairly.

STANDARD OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

A. DISCRIMINATION: The dental public health professional must not discriminate against any individual or group on the basis of race, creed, color, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, age, and other personal characteristics.

B. COMMUNITY PRACTICE: The dental public health professional has a duty to promote policies that ensure the equitable distribution of available resources.

C. COMMUNITY POLICY: The dental public health professional has a duty to ensure that spokespersons for the public or segments of the public under consideration are included in the public policy development process and, to the extent possible, in the administration of programs on behalf of such groups.

Principle 5: Veracity ("Truthfulness")

The dental public health professional must be honest and not misleading in all communications.

STANDARD OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

A. REFERENCES: The dental public health professional respects copyrights and responsibly attributes original ideas.

B. RELIABILITY: The dental public

health professional abides by his or her written and verbal direct and implied agreements.

C. CONFLICT OF INTEREST: The dental public health professional does not engage in activity in which there is a conflict of interest or discloses where there is a potential for, or appearance of, conflict of interest.

E. DEGREES: The dental public health professional refrains from using unearned and nonprofessionally related degrees.

Principle 6: Professionalism ("Collegiality")

The dental public health professional has a duty to ensure the development of the science, art, and practice of dental public health among colleagues; to recruit, educate, and train future dental public health professionals; and to promote dental public health understanding and practices by the public.

STANDARD OF PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

A. ADVANCEMENT OF KNOWLEDGE: The dental public health professional should contribute to the scientific literature, participate in professional and community meetings, and to otherwise share his or her knowledge and skills with colleagues and the public.

B. MENTORING: The dental public health professional has a duty to promote the development of those who possess less experience and/or skills.

C. SERVICE: The dental public health professional has a duty to promote this code in all his or her social and community endeavors.

D. MISCONDUCT: The dental public health professional has an obligation to protect the public, to lead by example, and to advise colleagues who may not be abiding by this code.