

Managing Conflicts & Ending the Dentist-Patient Relationship

Flow Charts

These flow charts help clarify dentists' obligations under the RCDSO's *Managing Conflicts and Ending the Dentist-Patient Relationship* Standard of Practice.

Whether it is necessary or appropriate to end the dentist-patient relationship is often a matter of professional judgement. Decisions to manage conflicts and end the dentist-patient relationship must comply with the Standard and take into consideration its accompanying resources,ⁱ other relevant RCDSO guidance,ⁱⁱ the circumstances of the situation, and the best interests of the patient.

General Requirements

A conflict arises that affects the dentist-patient relationship.¹

Does the conflict involve the patient engaging in abusive or harassing behaviour towards the dentist, staff and/or other patients?

No

Have reasonable efforts to resolve the conflict been made?

Yes, they succeeded

No further conflict resolution efforts needed.

Yes, they failed

Could the conflict compromise patient care?²

Yes

Dentists are advised to consider ending the dentist-patient relationship in circumstances where patient care may be compromised.

No

Dentists must use judgement to determine whether ending the dentist-patient relationship is appropriate, in compliance with the Standard.³

Yes, the patient is harassing office staff

Dentists may end the dentist-patient relationship in compliance with the Standard.

No

Make reasonable efforts to resolve the conflict.

Is the conflict resolved?

No

Yes

No further conflict resolution efforts needed.

ⁱ Which include case scenarios, FAQs, template dismissal letters, and this flow chart.

ⁱⁱ Such as, but not limited to, the RCDSO's *Change of Practice Ownership* Practice Advisory, *Release and Transfer of Patient Records* Practice Advisory, and *Prevention of Boundary Violations and Sexual Abuse* Standard of Practice.

¹ A conflict refers to any situation that negatively impacts the trust and/or respect in a dentist-patient relationship and may compromise safe and effective care. The term 'patient' is used in this flow chart for brevity, but 'a person closely associated with a patient' may also be involved in a conflict. As a reminder, dentists must document details related to conflicts and ending the dentist-patient relationship in the patient record.

² This includes where the dentist believes the dentist-patient relationship has broken down and cannot be repaired, or they are unable to provide safe and effective care that meets the standard of care, or complies with RCDSO's Standards of Practice or the *Foundations of Professionalism*.

³ Dentists can refer to the companion resources (Case Scenarios and FAQs) and/or contact RCDSO's *Practice Advisory Service* for assistance.

⁴ Please note: when efforts to resolve a conflict involve engaging directly with someone other than the patient, dentists must not disclose any personal health information except with the patient's consent or as permitted by law.

⁵ for example, policies related to payment of fees, late cancellations or missed appointments.

The below example is for illustration only. It does not reflect the complexity of real-world situations, and may not apply in all circumstances. Dentists must consider the circumstances of each situation, the best interests of their patient, and exercise their professional judgement when managing these and other conflicts.

Example

A patient is repeatedly non-compliant with office policies.^{1,5}

Does this conflict involve the patient engaging in abusive or harassing behaviour towards the dentist, staff and/or other patients?

No

Have reasonable efforts to resolve the conflict been made? For example, has the patient,⁴ been made aware of the policies?

Yes, they succeeded

The patient now complies with office policies. No further conflict resolution efforts needed.

Yes, they failed

The patient continues to be non-compliant with office policies. In the dentist's professional judgment, could patient care be compromised as a result?²

No

Make reasonable efforts. For example, share relevant policies with the patient, and advise of future consequences for non-compliance. If appropriate, make other efforts to resolve the conflict.

Is the conflict resolved?

Yes

Dentists are advised to consider ending the dentist-patient relationship in circumstances where patient care may be compromised.

No

Whether to end the dentist-patient relationship is a matter of dentists' professional judgment, with consideration for the patient's best interests and the requirements of the Standard.²

No

No further conflict resolution efforts needed.