



Ethics and Access to Care in Dentistry

Mary McNally, Professor, Department of Dental Clinical Sciences; Cross-appointed to the Department of Bioethics.

The following discussion questions are provided as an additional educational tool to accompany this fireside chat video. Please feel free to select the questions that are most relevant to your committee or group, and to revise and adapt them as needed, etc. As always, we welcome feedback on this or any other NSHEN resource.

Questions:

- Dr. McNally gives an example of how private payment may give rise to confidentiality concerns in cases where dentists are dealing with mature minors, who may have health issues they do not wish their parents to know about. Consider the example with the mature minor who has an eating disorder such as bulimia and discuss how to balance the need for optimal care with the patient's right to confidentiality in this and/or similar cases.
- Dr. McNally suggests that the private setting of dentistry contributes to a gap between oral health care and general health care. Explore the ethical concerns around patient care in this context.
- What are some of the connections between oral health and overall health and well-being? What are some potential ethical implications of those connections when dental care is often provided separately from other health care?
- Discuss some possible ways to enhance collaboration between dentists and other medical professionals around patient care.
- How do you think private payment might influence decision making in dentistry?
- Explore the ethics issues related to the tensions between providing optimal care and preventing harm to patients who may not be able to afford specialist treatment. Explore similar tensions that might arise in other health care settings.
- Dr. McNally mentions that 1 in 5 Canadians face various barriers to oral health care. She lists a number of initiatives introduced to address some of the existing barriers. How else might we address the problems around justice and access to oral health care?
- Discuss ethical reasons for and against including dental care under publicly funded health plans.

Resources

Beauchamp, T.L. and Childress J.F. (2012). Principles of Biomedical Ethics. Oxford University Press. 7th edition. First published in 1979.

Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. 2014. "Improving access to oral health care for vulnerable people living in Canada". <http://cahs-acss.ca/improving-access-to-oral-health-care-for-vulnerable-people-living-in-canada/>

Canadian Dental Association (CDA), CDA Principles of Ethics [https://www.cda-adc.ca/en/about/ethics/](https://www.cda-adc.ca/en/about/ethics/Ethics%20in%20Dentistry%20Part%20I%20-%20Principles%20and%20Values)
Ethics in Dentistry: Part I - Principles and Values. Dental continuing education courses. Course no. 510.
<https://www.dentalcare.com/en-us/professional-education/ce-courses/ce510/autonomy>

This webpage provides a short overview of key ethical principles and concepts, such as autonomy, justice, informed consent and confidentiality as they apply to dentistry.

Lahey, B. (2010). "Legal Framework of Canada's Health Care System". In Downie J, McEwen K, Hadskis M, MacInnis W. Dental Law in Canada. 2010. Lexus Nexus Canada, Markham.

Matthews, D.C, Clovis, J.B., Brillant, M.S.; Filiaggi, M. J.; McNally, M.E.; Kotzer, R.D.; Lawrence, H.P.(2012). Oral Health Status of Long-Term Care Residents—A Vulnerable Population. J Can Dent Assoc 2012;78:c3.
<http://www.jcda.ca/article/c3>

McNally M., Kenny N. (1999). Ethics in an Aging Society: Challenges for Oral Health Care. Journal of Canadian Dental Association; 65; 623-6. <https://www.cda-adc.ca/jcda/vol-65/issue-11/623.html>

McNally, M. and Snow, P. (2010). Examining the Implications of Dental Treatment Costs for Low-Income Families. J. Can. Den. Assoc. 2010;76:28. <http://www.jcda.ca/sites/default/files/pdf/a28.pdf>

Dinshaw F. Nurse: Bad teeth issue in care homes, Province says steps being taken to ensure good dental health for seniors in care. The Chronicle Herald, September 9, 2016.

Sutherland L. Opinion: Vulnerable long-term-care residents suffer for lack of oral care. The Chronicle Herald, September 7, 2016. Available online <http://thechronicleherald.ca/editorials/1394935-opinion-vulnerable-long-term-care-residents-suffer-for-lack-of-oral-care>

Provincial Dental Board of Nova Scotia. Code of Ethics. <http://pdbns.ca/about/regulation/code-of-ethics>

Naidoo, S. (2015). Ethical Considerations in Community Oral Health. Journal of Dental Education; Vol 79, No. 5, Supplement.
<http://www.jdentaled.org/content/79/5suppl/S38.full.pdf>

Whitney, C. "Enough talk about the oral-systemic link: It's time to bridge the gap between dentistry and medicine". Available online: <http://www.dentistryiq.com/articles/2014/01/enough-talk-about-the-oral-systemic-link-its-time-to-bridge-the-gap-between-dentistry-and-medicine.html>

Some articles require access with an institutional login. If you need assistance in accessing an article please email NSHEN administrator Krista Mleczo-Skerry at Krista.MleczoSkerry@iwk.nshealth.ca