

Guest Editorial

A standard can be interpreted in many ways. Collins defines the word as “an accepted example of something against which others are judged or measured”.¹The regulating body in any given jurisdiction will usually prepare or endorse a code of conduct for dental practice, outlining responsibilities and obligations to patients, the community, colleagues and to the profession of Dentistry. Competent clinical standards include knowledge, critical thinking and problem solving skills, and technical and procedural skills. Standards enforced during undergraduate training are, to a large degree, discretionary on graduation – it is up to the individual to set and maintain clinical, infection control and occupational health, safety and welfare standards in a team environment.

Accepted ethical standards include such issues as provision of treatment that is consistent with the best interests of the patient, clear treatment options and consent, and confidentiality of patient details. Legally, “unprofessional conduct” may include “a contravention of or failure to comply with ... a code of conduct or professional standards”.²

Record keeping standards for general dental practitioners are of keen interest to forensic odontologists – we use other people’s records, and hence their standards, to form opinions. In that capacity we assimilate and analyse information, distinguish between fact and opinion, and interpret dental evidence in a critical and scientific manner. Poor record keeping in others hinders our ability to identify deceased or comment on injury patterns. As a specialized discipline within dentistry, forensic odontology standards are mandatory. They

afford us legal protection, if questioned about methodology, and allow quality management when training newcomers to the discipline.

Finally, publication in scientific literature also carries obligations to meet standards for conduct of research. Research may be defined as original investigation undertaken to gain knowledge, understanding and insight.³ Implicit within this definition is intellectual honesty and integrity, and scholarly and scientific rigour. Management of research data and materials, publication and dissemination of research findings, including proper attribution of authorship, and effective peer review require scholarly standards which must be met by authors and editors if the credibility of research within the field of forensic odontology is to prosper.

Professional standards in dentistry are determined by legislative requirements and peer opinion and we are obliged, as professionals, to uphold standards of excellence. Judicial testing in Courts of Law is an added reason to develop and maintain standards in forensic odontology.

REFERENCES

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3. Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/r39syn.htm>

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