

Ethics In Pediatric Dentistry- A Review

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Abstract

Aim: Ethics is a discipline of philosophy and religion that comes from the Greek term ethos, which signifies character or behaviour. The moral principles or virtues that control the character and behaviour of an individual or a group are known as ethics. It is our goal as paediatric dentists to increase ethical responsibility and encourage ethical dental practise.

Background: In modern pedodontics, as in other branches of dentistry and medicine, a set of principles contribute to the establishment of codes of ethics, which are prescribed by regulatory bodies as well as professional associations and thus serve as a guiding light in distinguishing between right and wrong, performing one's responsibilities, and maintaining good interpersonal relationships. Ethical principles are the moral norms and rationale sources that must be followed in order to perform ethical behaviour. There are five key ideas that serve as decision-making guidelines. Ethics is

an essential component of any vocation. The focus of this essay is on paediatric dentist ethics.

Conclusion: The perspectives of the kid, the parent or family, the dentist, as well as society or the health-care system, should all be considered. This is especially vital when children and adolescents are involved in a therapeutic procedure, thus informed consent is critical.

Keywords: Pediatric dentistry, Ethics, Profession, pediatric informed consent

Introduction

Ethics is a discipline of philosophy and religion that comes from the Greek term ethos, which signifies character or behaviour. Morality is derived from the Latin word "mores," which meaning conventions or habits. Thus, ethics can be defined as the moral principles or virtues that regulate an individual's or a group's character and conduct.^{1,2}

In paediatric dentistry, ethical considerations begin with the kid patient in the clinic. It's critical to be able to connect with patients and provide appropriate dental

treatment and advice based on the greatest available scientific knowledge.³

Background

A dentist has moral responsibilities and obligations to his patients, his colleagues, and the general public. This aid in the support of autonomy and self-determination, the protection of the weak, and the promotion of human welfare and equality. These are referred to as "micro-ethical" principles, whereas "macro-ethical" principles govern population-based research and practise. Macro ethics is a set of principles aimed at safeguarding the human dignity, integrity, self-determination, confidentiality, rights, and health of populations and the people that make up such populations.⁴

It is our goal as paediatric dentists to increase ethical responsibility, promote ethical dentistry, develop ethical debate, and stimulate greater thinking on prevalent ethical challenges in dental practise..⁵

ADA Principles of Ethics

A profession's aspirational ideals and firm guideposts are the Principles of Ethics. The Code of Professional Conduct and Advisory Opinions are guided by them, and they provide reason for them. The ADA Code is built around five key principles: Patient autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, and honesty are all important concepts..⁵

Patient autonomy: Is a patient's right to make his or her own decisions about the care he or she will get. The dentist and the patient have equal rights in the decision-making process, according to Ozar and Sokol's model of the patient-dentist interaction. Three factors describe this relationship:

- a) They deserve each other's respect;
- b) They each have their own set of values; and

c) They each approach the patient's oral health decision-making process with the awareness that information must be shared.⁶

Non maleficence: Essentially, it states that a dentist shall not inflict a patient needless injury. However, in other cases, pain may be required to obtain the intended result; the patient must decide on the level of discomfort that is acceptable to them. Certain methods may have a "double effect," which indicates that although they resolve one problem, they also cause another. It is critical for the dentist to keep his or her skills and knowledge of procedures up to date, to understand their limitations, and to understand when and under what circumstances it may be permissible to execute a technique that is safe for the patient.⁶

This is true even in the realm of dentistry, as each medical specialty has its own professional boundaries. Once a dentist starts working with a patient, he or she must see the patient through the entire treatment process. If a dentist believes he or she will be unable to complete the procedure for whatever reason, the patient must be referred to a specialist.⁶

Finally, the dentist's ethical need to avoid interpersonal interactions with his or her patients falls under nonmaleficence. This can hinder a dentist's ability to use professional judgement in treatment decisions and may take advantage of the patient's trust in the dentist..⁷

The principle of **beneficence** refers to the act of promoting or doing good. It is critical to provide professional and timely dental care that is tailored to the patient's needs, desires, and values. Community service, such as providing free or cheap dental care to the underprivileged, and disclosing investigative findings that promote or safeguard the general public's health are examples of this field of ethics.⁷

Justice: Serving patients without regard to race, creed, colour, sex, or national origin is part of practising justice. This includes possible discrimination in recommendations to other dental practitioners and employment practises. Fairness in relationships with patients, coworkers, and society should be the primary obligation of dentists. The concept of the dentistry profession actively pursuing the potential to increase access to care for all people throughout society is included into the concepts of justice. According to Ozar and Sokol, society frequently dictates what is reasonable and unjust, so dentists must rely on societal cues to assure ethical compliance.⁷

Being true and honouring the position of trust that is vital in the dentist-patient relationship, which includes being honest about their specialty and degrees, being truthful in communication without deception, and keeping intellectual integrity..⁷

ADA Codes of Ethics

The Code of Professional Conduct outlines the forms of behaviour that are either necessary or banned. It's a result of the ADA's legal framework. The Codes are made up entirely of resolutions passed by the ADA's House of Delegates. It mainly binds the members of the ADA, and violations may result in disciplinary action.⁵

The ADA Code is a living document that is the outcome of a continual discussion between the dental profession and society. As a result, it is susceptible to revision.⁵

Advisory opinions by ADA

Advisory Opinions are interpretations of the Code of Professional Conduct that apply to specific facts. The ADA's Council on Ethics, Bylaws, and Judicial Affairs adopts these to give members advice on how the Council might interpret the Code of Professional Conduct in disciplinary proceedings.⁵

Values in clinical dental ethics

Six values to be followed in dentistry by OZAR & SOKOL:

The patient's life and general health: All practitioners and patients are concerned with the preservation of life and the promotion of general health. Dentists should not undertake treatment that puts the lives or health of their patients at jeopardy under normal circumstances.

The patient's oral health: Oral health comprises painless and healthy oral function. Age, stage of development, overall health, and the patient's functional requirements all influence appropriate functioning.

The patient's autonomy: Autonomy, or freedom, is a third idea that patients and dentists value. In the context of health care, autonomy refers to the ability of patients to make their own health care decisions that represent their beliefs and goals. If a patient requests therapy that would significantly harm oral health, and the dentist complies with the request out of respect for the patient's autonomy and performs the procedure, the dentist would be acting unprofessionally."

Dentist's preferred pattern of practice: Dentists receive significant signals about treatment options during their formal education, which are frequently incorporated into their chosen practice principles.

Esthetic value: Dentists recognise that facial and intraoral appearances are important to patients, and they routinely consider esthetic factors in their treatment recommendations.

Efficiency in the use of resources: Dentists understand how essential facial and intraoral looks are to patients, and they include aesthetic elements into their treatment recommendations on a regular basis.¹⁰

Profession

The American College of Dentists defines a profession as (a) an occupation involving relatively long and

specialized preparation on the level of higher education and governed by a special code of ethics.

"An occupation that governs itself through systematic, necessary training and collegial discipline; that has a foundation in technical, specialised knowledge; and that has a service rather than profit orientation, as codified in its code of ethics," according to Starr.⁷

Professionalism

Professionalism encompasses the conduct, behaviour, and attitude of an individual in his professional environment, as well as the conduct, goals, and qualities that define a professional or a profession. It specifies the behavioural requirements for a specific occupation. The phrase is frequently perceived as a trait in both behaviour and character that corresponds to an individual's application of superior knowledge, skill, and judgement for the benefit of others, even when self-interest is not considered. In essence, the word highlights the importance of dental practitioners and professional organisations putting the health of the patients they serve first.⁸

Ethical Decision Making

Both the dentist and the patient acknowledge certain obligations related to the patient-dentist interaction from the minute they enter a dental clinic. Making "ethical decisions" is an endless process. It can be difficult for a dentist to make professional and ethical judgments when it comes to manipulating data on an insurance form to gain better treatment for a patient, advising a patient of possibly unhealthy habits, or judging that another dentist's work is inferior. The decision-making process can often be as easy as adopting the "Golden Rule," but it can also be significantly more difficult in specific instances⁹

Doctors Ozar and Sokol present four steps to making ethical decisions relating to dental situations.

- **Identifying the alternatives**, entails determining the best course of action, defining the procedure's consequences, and communicating the most important aspects of each treatment to the patient.

- The dentist's professional judgement decides what is at risk professionally; he or she should analyse the normative action done in similar treatment scenarios and apply those considerations to the decision-making process.

responsibility when treatment fails prematurely

- **Determining what else is ethically at stake**, takes a broader view of what is at stake morally for the patient in each treatment option

- Finally, in deciding what should be done or rating the alternatives, many values, virtues, rules, rights, and professional norms are applied to the decision. Regardless of the outcome, ethical principles must be considered when making dental treatment decisions.¹⁰

Nature of Ethical Problems

Justification; providing service only when it is convenient; refusing to accept.¹⁰

How Dentists Perceive Ethical Problems

Every clinical, scientific, or legal problem must be evaluated. When the dentist understands that the evaluation entails a balance between the value of alleviating pain and other values that the patient may confirm, the evaluation may become an ethical dilemma.¹⁰

Obligations towards patients

In the dentist-patient interaction, it is the obligation of both parties to take the initiative and give relevant information. Respecting patient privacy, maintaining confidence, being truthful, and considering patient values are all critical. I make treatment choices.¹¹

Eight categories of professional obligations have been described:

1. The group of persons whose well-being is the most important commitment is known as the **Chief Client**.
2. The ideal dentist-patient relationship is built on mutual respect and acknowledges that both the dentist and the patient bring essential values to the professional environment.
3. Central Values focuses on a set of values that each profession is responsible for protecting for its clients;
4. The need to learn and retain the skills required to perform professional activities is included in competence;
5. The relative importance of the patient's well-being should be given great weight, but not absolute weight;
6. Because so many various categories must be addressed, there is no single description of ideal interactions between dentists and their co-professionals. However, there are professional obligations to co-professionals;
7. The relationship between dentistry and the greater community refers to the interaction between the profession as a whole, or its individuals, and the larger community, as well as nonprofessional groups and others;
8. Integrity and Education are the subtle components of behaviour by which a person conveys to others what he or she stands for, not just in the acts selected, but also in how those acts are done and how the person presents to others while carrying them out.¹¹

Informed Consent

In health care, obtaining consent is both an ethical concept and a legal duty that must be followed in practice. Dentists must provide patients with sufficient information about treatment options, risks, and benefits

so that they can make informed decisions before consenting to any dental intervention.¹²

Informed consent should be viewed as a tool of assisting the patient rather than a legal requirement, and the consent form should not be used as a substitute for patient dialogue and communication.¹³

Informed consent is most clearly defined in guidelines on consent to medical research, not to treatment.” Informed consent is considered vital in the delivery of health care by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD).¹⁴

Concepts of informed consent

The concept of informed consent is guided by elements of consent-

Disclosure: the subject should receive a thorough disclosure of information about an intervention.

Comprehension: The subject should fully understand the intervention

Voluntariness: The subject acts “voluntarily” in giving consent.

Competent: The subject should be fully competent to give consent.

Consent: The subject should provide consent either oral or written.¹⁵

Ethics in informed consent

The concept of informed consent has been ingrained in the modern medical and dentistry professions. Informed consent has yet to establish itself in dental practise, as evidenced by the current state of affairs.¹⁶

Pediatric informed consent

It is assumed that the patient giving consent is of legal age. Treatment permission should be obtained from a parent or legal guardian for patients who are not adults or have limited mental capacity. The adult accompanying the paediatric patient must be his or her legal guardian, which means the adult has been granted

legal authority to give consent on behalf of the patient for any medical procedures. This means that unless a grandparent, stepparent, noncustodial parent in the case of divorce, babysitter, or family friend has been confirmed as legal guardian by the court, they cannot give consent for a kid. A caregiver can accompany an orphan or any kid in a ward, but the caregiver must have formal confirmation of guardianship before providing consent to medical treatment.^{13,14}

Discussion

Ethics is a topic that touches almost every decision made in a dental practise, involving both judging and choosing actions. Patients, the public, office workers, and other professionals are all affected by ethics. It is consciously or unconsciously considered in all aspects of life. It is influenced by its surroundings and everything that contributes to the environment.^{2,17}

According to Nash, in 1984, stated that ethics was the key to expressing mutual respect among people.

Ethics, according to B.F. Skinner in 1971, was a matter of performance disparity, devoid of personal values, and consisting primarily of activities that had to be learned by the contingency management.

In his book "The Story of Philosophy," published in 1954, Durant argued that the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle considered ethics as a value to be pursued, and that it was the foundation of life's balance and personal satisfaction.

Brinton claimed in 1950 that ethics was merely a choice between two routes, which was exacerbated by the lack of provision for sin forgiveness.¹⁷

Johnson claimed in 1946 that philosophical approaches to ethics were preferable to a dualistic approach to ethics, which may help dental professionals develop a more eclectic approach to professional personal ethics.¹⁸

The ethics codes were established four decades ago. Because the profession, as well as service providers' marketing to reach out to the masses, has changed dramatically, it is also necessary to update certain codes.

¹⁹ The study by Acharya AK et al. reveals that the majority of practitioners violate the dental code of ethics in their clinical practise. State dental councils should establish an ethics committee to oversee practitioners and dental facilities. ¹⁷ It is up to regulatory authorities like the DCI to take necessary steps, such as revising its regulations as soon as possible and ensuring strict conformity. Dentists also have a moral obligation to keep track of their own activities.¹⁹

Conclusion

Every doctor should observe ethical standards and conducts in their daily therapeutic practise. The perspectives of the kid, the parent or family, the dentist, as well as society or the health-care system, should all be considered. This is especially critical when it comes to including children and adolescents in therapeutic procedures, thus informed consent is crucial. As pedodontists, it is critical that we –

1. Understand all of the responsibilities that we must assume in our profession.
2. Provide service with attention and professionalism.
3. The patient must come first above all else.

As a result, as a true professional, every treatment decision, including the final decision about patient care, should have an ethical component.

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