

Guidance on advertising

1.3.3 of *Standards for the Dental Team* states that:

‘You must make sure that any advertising, promotional material or other information that you produce is accurate and not misleading, and complies with the GDC’s guidance on ethical advertising.’

All information or publicity material regarding dental services should be legal, decent, honest and truthful.

Your advertising can be a source of information to help patients make informed choices about their dental care. Advertising that is false, misleading or has the potential to mislead, is unprofessional, may lead to a fitness to practise investigation and can be a criminal offence.

Patients may be confused and uncertain about dental treatment so you should take special care when explaining your services to them. This includes providing balanced, factual information which enables them to make an informed choice about their treatment. You must not exploit the trust, vulnerability or relative lack of knowledge of your patients.

Misleading claims can make it more difficult for patients to choose a dental professional or dental services and can raise expectations which cannot be fulfilled. In more serious cases, they can put patients at risk of harm from an inappropriate choice.

Patients can check whether you are registered and whether you are on a specialist list, but they are more likely to rely on information that you provide such as practice leaflets or certificates on the practice wall. You must be honest in the presentation of your skills and qualifications.

Advertising services

Whenever you, your practice, or any place where you work as a registrant, produce any information containing your name, you are responsible for checking that it is correct. You must:

- i) ensure information is current and accurate;
- ii) make sure that your GDC registration number is included;
- iii) use clear language that patients are likely to understand;
- iv) back up claims with facts;
- v) avoid ambiguous statements; and
- vi) avoid statements or claims intended or likely to create an unjustified expectation about the results you can achieve.

Guidance on advertising

You must make clear in advertisements and other practice publicity whether the practice is NHS (or equivalent health service), mixed or wholly private.

If you wish to offer services which your training as a dental professional does not qualify you to provide, you must make sure you undertake appropriate additional training to attain the necessary competence. You must not mislead patients into believing that you are trained and competent to provide other services purely by virtue of your primary qualification as a healthcare professional, but you should make clear that you have undertaken extra training to achieve competence.

Endorsing products

You should only recommend particular products if they are the best way to meet a patient's needs. If you endorse products, you must ensure that you only provide factual information about the product which can be verified by evidence. You should also be careful not to express or imply that your view is shared by the whole profession.

Marketing websites

If you promote your services on marketing or social networking websites (e.g. Groupon, Living Social and Facebook) you must make clear that the treatment advertised may not be appropriate for every patient and that it is conditional on a satisfactory assessment being carried out. You must assess the patient, obtain appropriate consent, obtain a medical history and explain all the options before carrying out any work.

Websites

In line with European guidance¹, if you are mentioned on a website as a dental professional providing dental care you must ensure the following is displayed:

- i) your professional qualification and the country from which that qualification is derived; and
- ii) your GDC registration number.

If you are responsible for a dental practice website

You must ensure that the following information is displayed:

- i) the name and geographic address at which the dental service is provided;
- ii) contact details of the dental service, including e-mail address and telephone number;

1 The Council of European Dentists' (CED) EU Manual of Dental Practice contains extensive information on oral health systems as well as legal and ethical regulations across the EU. In particular this includes the Code of Ethics for Dentists in the EU for Electronic Commerce which covers the content of websites

Guidance on advertising

- iii) the GDC's address and other contact details, or a link to the GDC website;
- iv) details of the practice's complaints procedure and information about who patients may contact if they are not satisfied with the response (namely the relevant NHS (or equivalent) body for NHS treatment and the Dental Complaints Service for private treatment) and
- v) the date the website was last updated.

You must update the information showing on your website regularly so that it accurately reflects the personnel at the practice and the service offered.

You must also ensure that you do not display information comparing the skills or qualifications of any dental professional providing any service with the skills and qualifications of other dental professionals.

Specialist titles

If you are a dentist and are on a GDC specialist list you can use the title 'Specialist' or describe yourself as a 'specialist in....'

If you are a dentist and you are not on a GDC specialist list you must not use titles which may imply specialist status such as Orthodontist, Periodontist, Endodontist etc.

There are no specialist lists for dental care professionals. If you are a dental care professional you must ensure that you do not mislead patients by using titles which could imply specialist status, such as 'Smile specialist' or 'Denture specialist'.

If you are not on a specialist list you must not describe yourself as 'specialising in...' a particular form of treatment but may use the terms 'special interest in..', 'experienced in..' or 'practice limited to..'

Honorary degrees and memberships

Patients may think that letters after your name indicate that you have gained further qualifications. You must not list memberships or fellowships of professional associations, or societies or honorary degrees in an abbreviated form because it may mislead patients.

Effective from 30 September 2013