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## Dental Council statement on code of practice pertaining to public relations and communications

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## **Dental Council Statement on Code of Practice pertaining to Public Relations and Communications**

You are respectfully reminded of your obligations and responsibilities under the Code of Practice Pertaining to Public Relations and Communications. All information or other publicity material aimed at the public regarding dental services must be legal, decent, honest and truthful and must not have the potential to mislead the public or impugn the professional reputation or integrity of colleagues. Registered practitioners must avoid statements or claims which could reasonably be interpreted as creating an unjustified expectation on the part of the public of the benefits of any particular treatments. The Council recommends that practitioners publish their Dental Council registration number on promotional material.

Dental Council takes this opportunity to clarify for registrants their obligations under the Code in the following circumstances:

### **Use of Titles:**

Registered practitioners not registered in the Register of Dental Specialists maintained by the Dental Council shall not use any form of words that could reasonably be interpreted by a member of the public to convey that a practitioner is practicing as a specialist. In this context the use of the term “special interest” is specifically prohibited. Practitioners are reminded that failure to comply with this may lead to the Council referring the matter to the Fitness to Practice Committee and/or criminal proceedings under the Dentists Act, 1985.

### **Use of Photographs or other Images:**

Where pre-and/or post-treatment photographs or other images used to promote the efficacy or advantages of any particular treatment are not of treatment carried out by the advertising practitioner or his/her practice this must be clearly stated in the advertisement / web presence.

### **Use of the Media:**

Registered practitioners are reminded that, under Section 11 of the Code, they should avoid personal media publicity where such publicity might result in any professional advantage to them.

In this context a book, an unpaid article (where payment is neither made nor received by the dentist) or an interview on a dental topic will not be regarded as an advertisement on condition that the practitioner’s name and qualifications are not published simultaneously with any practice identification and contact details.

In all other circumstances media publicity will be deemed to be advertising and therefore the practitioner will be deemed responsible if the contents breach any of the Council's Codes of Practice. Where advertisements take the form of "advertorials" in any medium it must be clearly written or stated in some understandable and accessible manner that the article / media piece is an advertisement.

**Patient Testimonials:**

In using testimonials from patients in support of a dentist or his or her practice, or a treatment available in a specified practice registrants must ensure that these testimonials are from bona-fide patients of that practice who have received the treatment referred to in the testimonial. If patients giving such testimonials have received remuneration for so doing this must be clearly stated in the publication. The Dental Council reserves the right to seek verification of the details contained in any such testimonial

Practitioners are welcome to seek advice from the Dental Council in relation to these matters prior to publication of promotional material.

**Product Endorsement:**

Any registered practitioner endorsing any product must ensure that no details appear anywhere in the endorsement article linking that practitioner to a particular practice.

**Web Presence:**

A dental web presence must display the following information:

- The name and address of the practice;
- Contact details, including practice opening hours, telephone number and e-mail address;
- The name and qualification details (including the country from which that qualification is derived) of the principal dentist in the practice and ideally every registered practitioner working in that practice;
- The date it was last updated.

It is recommended that a link to the website of the Dental Council ([www.dentalcouncil.ie](http://www.dentalcouncil.ie)) is also included. Registered practitioners must also ensure that the details contained on the website are not more than one month out of date. The Dental Council recommends that registered practitioners publish prices and their Dental Council registration number on their website.

Practitioners are deemed responsible for the content on all sites that are linked to the practitioner's website where it is reasonable to conclude that the link is intended to promote a practitioner or his/her practice. For example, if a practitioner has a link on his/her website to another containing information regarding certain treatments, it is

reasonable to construe that the site is intended to promote the practitioner's practice. The practitioner is deemed to be responsible for its contents and if the content of that website is in breach of the Code that practitioner will be accountable.

**Practice Descriptions:**

The use of subjective descriptions on any form of promotional material (including websites) is prohibited. Dentists may only use titles and/or descriptions approved or awarded by an appropriate independent verification body.

This statement must be considered as forming part of the Dental Council's Code of Conduct Pertaining to Public Relations and Communications. The Code, together with this clarification, has been forwarded to the Press Council and the Advertising Standards Authority.

Registered practitioners are reminded that non-compliance with this Code may lead to the Council referring the matter to the Fitness to Practise Committee.