

The Role of the FDI

FDI is an international organization that seeks to represent all dentists, regardless of nationality or specialty, the FDI has undertaken the role of establishing general standards in dental ethics that are applicable worldwide. In addition to the International Principles of Ethics for the Dental Profession, the FDI has adopted policy statements on many specific ethical issues as well as other issues related to oral health, oral health policies and the dental profession.

How Does the FDI Decide What is Ethical?

- Achieving international agreement on controversial ethical issues, achieving international agreement on controversial ethical issues is not an easy task, even within a relatively cohesive group such as dentists.
- The FDI Working Group on Ethics and Dental Legislation through the Dental Practice Committee, is responsible for preparing statements on ethical issues, and amendments to existing statements, for consideration and approval by the Council and General Assembly.
- The FDI draws upon the history of dental ethics as reflected in its previous ethical statements.
- It also takes notes of other positions on the topic under consideration, both of national and international organizations and of individuals with skill in ethics.

On some issues, such as informed consent, the FDI finds itself in agreement with the majority view, while other issues like the confidentiality of personal dental information, the position of dentists may have to be promoted forcefully against those of governments, health system administrators and/or commercial enterprises.

How Do Individuals Decide What is Ethical?

For individual dentists and dental students, dental ethics does not consist simply in following the recommendations of the FDI or other dental organizations (why).

- ✓ These recommendations are usually general in nature and individuals need to determine whether or not they apply to the situation at hand.
- ✓ Moreover, many ethical issues arise in dental practice for which there is no guidance from dental associations. Individuals are ultimately responsible for making their own ethical decisions and for Implementing them.

There are different ways of approaching ethical issues

These can be divided roughly into two categories: non-rational and rational. non-rational does not mean irrational (that is, contrary to reason) but simply that it is to be distinguished from the systematic, reflective use of reason in decision making.

Non-rational approaches

Obedience: is a common way of making ethical decisions, especially by children and those who work within authoritarian structures (for example, the military, police, some religious organizations, many businesses). Morality consists in following the rules or instructions of those in authority, whether or not you agree with them.

Imitation: is similar to obedience in that it subordinates one's judgement about right and wrong to that of another person, in this case, a role model. Morality consists in following the example of the role model. This has been perhaps the most common way of learning dental ethics by aspiring dentists.

Feeling or desire: Is a subjective approach to moral decision-making and behavior. What is right is what feels right or satisfies one's desire; what is wrong is what feels wrong or frustrates one's desire.

Intuition: is an immediate perception of the right way to act in a situation. It is similar to desire in that it is entirely subjective; however, it differs because of its location in the mind rather than the will.

Habit: is a very efficient method of moral decision making since there is no need to repeat a systematic decision-making process each time a moral issue arises similar to one that has been dealt with previously.

Why habit could not be relied on?

- ✓ There are bad habits (for example, lying) as well as good ones (for example, truth-telling).
- ✓ Situations that appear similar may require significantly different decisions. As useful as habit is, therefore, one cannot place all one's confidence in it.

Rational approaches

Deontology: involves a search for well-founded rules that can serve as the basis for making moral decisions. An example of such a rule is, "Treat all people as equals.

Consequentialism: bases ethical decision-making on an analysis of the likely consequences or outcomes of different choices and actions. The right action is the one that produces the best outcomes.

Virtue ethics: focuses less on decision making and more on the character of decision makers as reflected in their behavior. A virtue is a type of moral excellence or competence.

As noted above, one virtue that is especially important for dentists is compassion. Others include honesty, prudence and dedication. Dentists who possess these virtues are more likely to make good decisions.

