



Dismissing a Patient – Practical and Ethical Concerns

CDSBC often receives inquiries from dental offices about how to dismiss a patient, as well as calls from patients upset that they have been dismissed from a practice.

The dentist-patient relationship can break down for many reasons: if a treatment is unsuccessful; if a patient refuses necessary treatment or insists on treatment that goes against the dentist's professional judgment; if a patient refuses to follow aftercare recommendations; if a mistake (real or perceived) was made in diagnosis, treatment or billing; or simply because the personalities of the patient and the dentist or the practice staff do not "mesh."

When the dentist-patient relationship breaks down and mutual trust and respect no longer exist, dismissing a patient may be the best option for both parties.

If you have decided that the relationship cannot be repaired and dismissing the patient is the only alternative, you must ensure the patient's oral health is not jeopardized in the dismissal process.

Any dental procedures started must be finished before dismissing the patient. This does not mean the entire treatment plan must be completed but, for example, a crown must be permanently cemented or a recently delivered denture adjusted.

Dismissing a patient must be done in writing. Your letter should advise the patient to find a new dentist and that you will be available for emergency care only for the following 60 days. Also notify them of any outstanding treatment you have recommended and inform the patient of the consequences of not having the treatment completed in a timely manner.

In addition, you may choose to provide the patient with the names of other local dentists or the telephone numbers for the BC Dental Association referral service (604 736 7202 or 1 888 396 9888) or their website, www.bcdental.org (click on "Find a Dentist"). Indicate that you will forward a copy of the patient's records to their new dentist or provide the patient with copies. A reasonable fee may be charged to the patient for copying records as per the Code of Ethics made under the *Health Professions Act*.

Your letter should be sent by registered mail, with a return receipt requested, or by another service that provides confirmation of delivery.

Throughout this process you should ensure you keep detailed, factual records and include notes of all conversations with the patient and their representative(s).

