



### Purpose

This document aims to clarify and reinforce the existing professionalism responsibilities expected of all denturists whether they practice as clinicians, educators, managers, and/or researchers.

The public expects denturists to provide safe, competent, and ethical care and services.

### Professionalism discourse

'Medical Professionalism' is under increasing scrutiny across all health and social care professions. Recent high-profile cases have focused on the ill effects of poor professionalism.

Most professional regulatory agencies that receive and manage professional complaints, such as the College of Alberta Denturists (the "College"), have repeatedly validated that many complaints are related to professional behaviour and not lack of knowledge or skills.

Taken together, these combined elements serve to demonstrate that health professions and health professionals must place increased focus and importance on speaking about professionalism to clarify the expectations for both the profession as a whole and each individual health professional.

While a lot of literature exists that highlights the importance of improving medical professionalism, many of the concepts are ill defined, full of nuances, and prove difficult to articulate or enact in a professional setting. Nevertheless, these key concepts exist and may be used to guide and enable professionalism to flourish.

### Medical professionalism

**At its very core, medical professionalism comes from the social contract that exists between society and medical professionals.**

In return for their societal contributions, medical professionals are granted the privilege of professional regulation and with this the opportunity to guide evolving professional practice.

This contract is reinforced by the mutual understanding, between professions and the public, that health professionals are respected and can be trusted to remain accountable to those they serve, to society, to their profession, and to themselves.

## Denturist professionalism

The public expects denturists to consistently uphold the professionalism expectations, through their on-going personal and professional actions, and to be respectful of the trust that society places in them.

Denturists serve this essential role, at least in part, through their demonstrated dedication to their profession and through their mastery of the art, science, and practice of denturism.

### FIGURE A – Applicable jurisprudence

- *Health Professions Act*
- *Denturists Profession Regulation*
- *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation*
- *College of Alberta Denturists – Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice*
- *Health Information Act*
- *Health Information Regulation*
- *Personal Information Protection Act*
- *Health Electronic Health Record Regulation*
- *Human Rights Act*
- *Public Health Act*
- *Communicable Disease Regulation*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Act*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation*
- *Occupational Health and Safety Code*
- *Criminal Code of Canada*

Currently established guidelines for denturist professionalism reflect society's expectations for denturists to:

- ☒ be clinically competent,
- ☒ be committed to ongoing professional development,
- ☒ promote the public good,
- ☒ adhere to high ethical standards,
- ☒ display the core values of integrity, honesty, humility, respect for diversity and transparency, and
- ☒ recognize and remove themselves from any real or perceived conflicts of interest.

## Alberta denturist standards

Minimum denturist professionalism requirements are clearly included in many laws, including the *Health Professions Act* (HPA) and the *Denturists Profession Regulation*, and in the College's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. Some critical elements of medical professionalism are also framed within criminal laws (i.e., neglect, assault, theft, abuse, and discrimination).

Combined, these laws and policies are used as a guide to professional practice and also inform procedures and sanctions when one falls short of meeting the required expectations.

Denturists are encouraged to review and become very familiar with the laws and policy documents associated with the profession. A non-exhaustive list of these applicable documents is identified in Figure A.

### **Alberta denturist professionalism expectations**

Professionalism expectations, which are incumbent upon every Alberta denturist, include the need to be of, and to maintain, good character, good reputation, and governability. These terms assist denturists in clearly defining minimum professionalism expectations.

**Good character** means having moral and ethical strength and includes having and demonstrating consideration for others, respect for the rule of law and legitimate authority, ability to know right from wrong, integrity, responsibility, accountability, fairness, open-mindedness, candor, honesty, truthfulness, and trustworthiness.

**Good reputation** means that others consider one to behave in a manner that demonstrates respect and consideration for others, respect for the rule of law and legitimate authority, knowing right from wrong, integrity, responsibility, accountability, fairness, open-mindedness, candor, honesty, truthfulness, and trustworthiness.

**Governability** means that one is capable and amenable to being governed (controllable and manageable) subject to laws, regulations, regulatory and administrative authority programs, standards, policies, procedures, directives, and rules.

### **Contextual concept of professionalism**

While health regulatory Colleges are obligated to establish professionalism baseline limits for professional actions and behaviours, it is important to understand that professionalism is highly contextual, varies between situations, and is dependent on many factors. For example, professionalism expectations will vary for a denturist working as a clinical practitioner, an educator, a manager and/or a researcher. A denturist educator may not interact directly with patients, but they would nonetheless have professional responsibilities to uphold in relation to their professional colleagues, their students, and their profession.

The contextual nature of professionalism explains why when considering professionalism, denturists must consider and reflect on their situations, and must consider various elements.

Figure B identifies additional contextual elements that should be considered and may impact upon one's professionalism expectations and requirements.

#### **FIGURE B – Contextual elements**

- Societal and professional role(s)
- Societal and professional environment(s)
- Socio cultural environment
- Relationship type(s)
- Activity type(s)
- Professional practice / work setting(s)
- Work team make-up
- Regulatory requirements
- Legal requirements
- Employment requirements
- Digital technology application(s)
- Communication type(s)

### **E-Professionalism**

E-professionalism refers to the application of the traditional concepts of medical professionalism when health professionals make use of or contribute to electronic digital media and social networking sites.

While there are many potential benefits to health professionals using electronic digital platforms and social networking sites, it remains that its use is faced with challenges especially those that have features that promote impulsive, uninhibited, and detrimentally immersive experiences. Additionally, such electronic platforms and sites often create permanent and visible digital footprints that may expose personal and professional boundary violations including breaches in privacy and/or confidentiality, infringements of human and/or patient rights, and transgressions of regulatory expectations.

Although there is a staggering rise in health professionals using digital platforms and social media networking sites, the concept of e-professionalism is still, in many respects, in its infancy. For these reasons, health professionals, like denturists, are often reminded that their professionalism expectations extend beyond their physical professional environment and include their personal electronic and digital medium personas.

### **Summary**

Doing what is right, and when it is ethically or morally correct, should be a matter of personal pride for any healthcare professional. Understanding that health professions and health professionals will be first and foremost judged by society is one of the most critical elements in living by the ethos that one actually truly understands what it means to be a professional.

While baseline denturist professionalism expectations may be set in regulations and laws, professionalism expectations are contextually dependent, and our understanding of the field is continuously evolving.

Respect and trust are important professional cornerstones and serve as the fulcrum of all dentist relationships including the important relationship that exists between the profession and the public it serves.

For these reasons, dentists must be aware of the existing and evolving nature of professionalism and must openly discuss and regularly reflect on their own adherence to these important standards.

*Please refer to the attached appendices for further guidance and practice scenarios that you may encounter.*

## APPENDIX A – Reflecting on Professionalism

Denturists may wish to reflect on their professionalism. The following questions are provided to assist in this reflection.

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### Questions for reflection consideration:

#### Personal introspection

- ☒ Which of my personal values align most closely with the professional denturist expectations detailed in the Code of Ethics?
- ☒ What personal values must I change/adjust/improve upon?
- ☒ What are my future personal goals, and where do I see myself in the next 5 or 10 years?
- ☒ How would others describe me from a personal value perspective?
- ☒ What are my personal value strengths and weaknesses?
- ☒ What do I do to respect and protect the rights of others in a way which is commensurate with what I expect from others?

#### Professional introspection

- ☒ What is expected of me as a professional denturist? - (consider your role(s) as a clinician, an educator, a manager, and/or a researcher)
- ☒ What is my professional purpose? What are my priority values?
- ☒ What does “serving the public interest” mean to me?
- ☒ How would my professional colleagues describe me as a denturist? What would they say my professional strengths and weaknesses are?
- ☒ Where do I professionally underperform? What have I done to improve and fulfill my professional improvement responsibilities?
- ☒ How does commercialism impact my responsibilities to act in the public interest?
- ☒ When I last used a social media site or a digital platform, what did I do to ensure that my use of this technology was beyond professional reproach?

#### Impactful patient/client/colleague introspection

- ☒ What have I done to ensure that my patients/clients have always benefited from my continuous quality care and service?
- ☒ What can/could I do to improve the quality of the care/service I provide my patients/clients?
- ☒ What actions have I taken to develop and maintain respectful and trusting relationships with my patients/clients, and colleagues?
- ☒ What are my professional responsibilities vis-à-vis the professional behaviour of my healthcare colleagues?
- ☒ How can I improve upon the way I manage situations where a patient/client is not satisfied?

## APPENDIX B – Professionalism Scenarios

Denturists may wish to reflect on their own professionalism. The following fictional scenarios are provided to assist in this reflection and include a brief analysis of each case which integrates the principles of good character, good reputation, and governability.

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### Scenario #1

A denturist determines that a patient will require a referral to a dentist. They discuss and document the referral and transfer of care with their patient and obtain their written consent to share all clinical record information with the dentist.

#### Situational Analysis

Circumstances arise when a denturist may refer a patient to another healthcare professional. Prior to transferring care, a denturist must consider the implications of such transfer including the patient's current needs and rights to receive ongoing care while the transfer is in progress. The denturist appropriately documents and discusses the care referral with their patient and obtains written consent to share care record information. The denturist's actions are compliant with professional and legal requirements.

### Scenario #2

A denturist knowingly engages in fraudulent billing practices including submitting false insurance claims, overcharging patients, and billing the insurance provider in advance of providing professional services.

#### Situational Analysis

This behaviour displays a lack of professional integrity, honesty, and accountability. Patients/clients and the public expect professional billing to reflect the services and products provided and to be charged in alignment with reasonable market rates, recommended fee guidelines, and accepted billing practices. In addition to contravening the profession's good character requirements, this type of behaviour may have far reaching personal and professional reputation implications, including that of eroding public trust and potentially removing the denturist's ability to directly bill insurance providers in the future.

### Scenario #3

A denturist makes disparaging comments about the College and a colleague on social media.

#### Situational Analysis

This behaviour displays a lack of professional integrity and a disdain for the College's legal authority to govern the profession in the public interest. The public and other health professionals expect all health professionals to act conscientiously and respectfully throughout their personal and professional interactions. This type of behaviour highlights serious breaches of good character and governability and

undermines the trust and respect that the public has for the dentist and the profession.

#### **Scenario #4**

A dentist is charged with a criminal offence under the *Criminal Code of Canada*. In keeping with health professional requirements, they report this to the College.

##### Situational Analysis

The public expects health professionals, such as dentists, to be upstanding citizens and to uphold the laws that govern them as both citizens and professionals. Professional regulation mandates that dentists self-report circumstances, as requested by the College. By self-reporting criminal charges or convictions, dentists recognize that certain circumstances may, or may not, have professional or practice implications; however, disclosure provides an opportunity for them to discuss the next steps with the College.

#### **Scenario #5**

A first-time denture wearer repeatedly complains to their dentist that they are unable to eat, and they experience a lot of pain when wearing their dentures. The dentist dismisses the patient's concerns and advises them that it will take time to get used to them.

##### Situational Analysis

Dentists must value and respect the trust that vulnerable patients and clients place in them as health professionals. Dismissing concerns and failing to provide accurate and timely assessments, treatments, referrals, and self-care follow-up information demonstrates a willful disregard for professional care standards. In addition to raising clinical competence questions, this type of behaviour may negatively impact the reputation of the dentist and the profession.

#### **Scenario #6**

A dentist seeks clinical assistance from a colleague and is overheard by a member of the public discussing a patient's particular case including the patient's private health information.

##### Situational Analysis

While collegial collaboration is encouraged, disclosure of a patient's personal and confidential health information is not permitted without consent. Patients and clients expect to receive private, confidential, and professional services. They also expect to be notified and/or advised if their information is shared with others. In addition to the privacy breach, the dentist's action may have significant reputational repercussions including eroding the trust and respect that the patient and the public have for the dentist profession.



### **Scenario #7**

A dentist engages in a close personal relationship with one of their patients. A clinic employee reports the dentist's actions to the College.

#### Situational Analysis

The dentist's decision to engage in a close personal relationship with their patient, even if they consent to it, constitutes a willful disregard for the established laws of Alberta. The dentist's boundary violations will have far reaching professional implications including being investigated by the College with further steps possible, professional practice and/or registration discipline, may erode public trust, and will have negative reputational impacts for both the dentist and the profession.

### **Scenario #8**

A dentist receives correspondence from the College regarding a professional practice complaint and the need for them to contact the College as soon as reasonably possible. The dentist willfully ignores the College's repeated attempts to contact the dentist.

#### Situational Analysis

The public expects dentists to comply with the laws and standards that govern them as regulated health professionals. In Alberta, the College regulates the provincial practice of dentistry and is responsible for following up with practice complaints. Dentists are expected to respond to and collaborate with the College in these situations. Dentists who do not comply with these requirements demonstrate a clear disdain for the laws of Alberta and the legal authority that governs them as health professionals.

### **Scenario #9**

A dentist operates their own clinic. Their caseload is such that it leaves little time for them to formalize their documentation practices in alignment with professional requirements. During a care referral, a fellow health professional identifies that the patient record is incomplete and contains erroneous information. They report their professional documentation findings to both the patient and the College.

#### Situational Analysis

Patients/clients and the public, including other health professionals, have a right to expect dentists to provide quality care and services. This includes completing thorough and professional documentation. By failing to meet the professional recordkeeping requirements, the dentist has not only jeopardized the patient's safety but may also have compromised their own professional reputation.

### **Scenario #10**

A dentist, who owns their own practice and employs other dentists, terminates the employment of a dentist employee. The employment termination is related to the dentist repeatedly providing incompetent care while their professional abilities were compromised by alcohol intoxication. The employing dentist does not notify

the College of the termination as they do not wish to negatively impact the dentist's reputation or the reputation of their clinic.

### Situational Analysis

Professional regulation mandates that employers report circumstances where the competence and/or fitness to practice of a dentist comes into question. The public expects professionals to know right from wrong and to take timely, appropriate actions which serve the public interest, including those that impact public safety. The employing dentist's failure to report the termination not only undermines public trust but may have grave legal, professional, and reputational consequences for the employer, the dentist, and the profession.

### **Scenario #11**

A busy dentist delegates, to their clinic admin, the task of completing their annual registration renewal application and entering their continuing competence information, including a self-reflection for a seminar they had attended that year.

### Situational Analysis

While prioritizing patient care remains a crucial professional responsibility, it is equally important for dentists to comply with their professional renewal responsibilities. Dentists are required to complete their own professional registration renewal with declarations and provide appropriate information regarding their professional continuing competence activities. Dentists are also expected to complete their own CCP records, especially one in which their own personal opinion is being sought. In addition to being noncompliant with professional good character and governability expectations, this behaviour undermines the integrity of the profession, may lead to professional conduct proceedings, and also jeopardizes the dentist's own professional reputation with their clinic employee.

### **Scenario #12**

A dentist decides that they will close their private clinic in six months and notifies the College regarding the upcoming clinic closure. In keeping with the collaborative College discussions, the dentist then proceeds with advising all clinic patients of possible referral options and provides information regarding medical records, location, retention, access, destruction, and transfer.

### Situational Analysis

Circumstances may arise that require a dentist to terminate or suspend clinic operations. In such circumstances, dentists can avoid patient complaints by collaborating with the College and ensuring that they discharge their professional duties in compliance with legislated requirements. Through such diligent business actions, dentists not only demonstrate their good character and governability but also help uphold the good name and reputation of the profession.

### **Scenario #13**

A rural Alberta dentist receives an emergency care request from a family member whose complete upper denture has broken in half. The family member indicates that they are unable to reach their regular dentist, that all clinics are currently closed for the long weekend, and that they desperately require their denture to eat. Given the circumstances, the dentist decides to repair the denture and advises the family member that they will require their written consent to transmit all related clinical treatment information to their regular dentist.

#### Situational Analysis

The law allows for dentists to provide episodic or emergent services to their spouse, adult interdependent partner, children and/or family members if timely appropriate referral cannot be made and delay in care may adversely impact or result in patient/client harm. The dentist proceeds with diligence, integrity, and care and pro-actively and appropriately addresses the relationship conflict. The dentist demonstrates their good character and governability by complying with the laws of Alberta, the professional practice and documentation requirements.

### **Scenario #14**

A dentist is randomly selected to undergo a validation of the Continuing Competence Program (CCP). Following their submission and review by the Registration Committee, the dentist receives a letter from the College, regarding identified challenges in their continuing competence information. The dentist promptly responds to the College and corrects a document discrepancy. The dentist is then advised by the College that the matter is resolved and that CCP requirements have been met.

#### Situational Analysis

Dentists must maintain their practice competence and comply with the College's CCP requirements. This includes maintaining orderly records of their CCP for at least five years after the end of the CCP cycle. In the case where regulatory CCP record validation identifies challenges or discrepancies, the College will communicate with dentists to clarify and/or remediate the discrepancy(ies). In most instances, CCP discrepancies can be resolved without the need for further Registration Committee review.

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