

# Dental Record Keeping: Dental Education

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## Abstract

The ability of clinical practitioners to produce and maintain good dental records is essential for good quality patient care as well as being a legal obligation. Dentist have a role to play in keeping accurate dental records and providing all important information so that legal authorities may recognize malpractice, negligence, abuse and identification of victim's.

## Keywords

Dental education, Dental Records, Radiographs, Malpractice, Dentist's, Forensic Odontology.

## Introduction

In brief, patient's record includes complete history, physical examination diagnosis, treatment and care of a patient.<sup>1</sup> The record may consist of different elements including written notes, radiographs, study models, referral letters, consultants reports, clinical photographs, results of special investigations, drug prescriptions, laboratory prescriptions, patient identification information and comprehensive medical history. It is essential that a practitioner maintains this information in easily accessible manner.<sup>2</sup> The production, retention and release of clear and accurate patient records is an essential part of dentist's professional responsibility.<sup>3</sup>

## Content of patient record

The patient's record consisting of the history, physical examination, diagnosis; treatment and care of a patient. The established minimum information in written notes should consists of<sup>2</sup>:

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## Identification data

Name, date of birth, phone numbers and emergency contact information.

## Medical History

Thorough investigation to include a minimum of :

- 1) Name and phone number of general physician.
- 2) Dentist's own evaluation of patient's general health and appearance.
- 3) List of systemic disease - diabetes, rheumatic fever, hepatitis etc.
  - (i) any ongoing medical treatment.
  - (ii) any bleeding disorders, drug allergies, smoking and history of alcohol consumption.
  - (iii) any cardiac disorders.
  - (iv) relevant family medical history.
  - (v) pregnancy.
  - (vi) physical and emotional tolerance for procedures.<sup>1</sup>
    - (a) Dental history.
    - (b) Clinical examination to include an accurate charting.
    - (c) Diagnosis.
    - (d) Treatment plan.
    - (e) Documentation of informed consent.

## How to create and maintain a patient record

Lawnery<sup>1</sup> describes a simple ten step procedure to ensure that ones records are adequate. A modified and expanded version, appropriate to the National Health Service, is given below:

- (1) Use a consistent style for entries : The appearance of the record is enhanced by using the same colour and type of pen, use the same abbreviations and notifications etc.
- (2) Date and explain any corrections : It may be a fatal error in a malpractice case if records appear doctored in any way. These unexplained corrections can undermine the credibility of the entire record and of treating dentist.
- (3) Do not use correction fluids : Not only is this messy, but it is conspicuous and may indicate that there has been an attempt to hide information.
- (4) Use ink : Pencil can fade and opens up the question of whether or not the records have been altered.
- (5) Use single line cross out : This preserves the integrity of the record and shows that you have nothing to hide.
- (6) Write legibly: An illegible record may be as bad as no record at all. Difficult to read entries can lead to guess work by others and this may not be favourable to you.
- (7) Express concerns about patient needs : By doing this one is documenting that one has listened, empathized, understood and acted upon the wishes of the patient. It also enables an explanation to be given should a patient's wishes be unobtainable own realistic and can help instantly diffuse a malpractice case.
- (8) Never write derogatory remarks in the record: Superfluous entries only serve to convey a feeling of un-professionalism and may give doubts to the overall credibility.
- (9) Only accepted abbreviations for treatments: This is helpful both in a malpractice situation and also when transferring records to dentist for referral, prior approval or a change in dentist of record.
- (10) Maintain a chronological order: The use of a hole punch and metal retainer clips in the top of the record may be helpful to keep loose sheet organized.

## **Radiographs**

Most common technique for radiograph storage is in a small envelope with patient's details type of radiograph and data listed on the front. The patient's record can quickly become filled with these envelopes and establishing a time line can be difficult and confusing, especially when endodontic films become co-mingled with diagnostic films. A mounting method can be a more effective solution to radiograph storage. As well as the need for accurate, well stored and documented radiographs, the frequency of radiographic examination is important. A patient's record that is lacking up to date radiographs may jeopardize a malpractice case and is against the patient's best interest.<sup>2-3</sup>

Computer maintain records : Paper records and radiographs can simply be scanned into a personal computer using a desktop scanner. Commonly used programs such as Adobe Photoshop 4.0 and Microsoft Program. By using these techniques the dentist can protect themselves from malpractice claims without using valuable storage space.

Forensic uses: Forensic odontology involves the management, examination, evolution and presentation of dental evidence in criminal or civil proceeding, all in the interest of justice. The most common element of forensic dentistry that a general practitioner is likely to encounter is to supply antemortem records to aid in human identification. The identification is normally carried out by a comparison of antemortem and post mortem records.

## **Conclusion**

Each dentist has a responsibility to understand the forensic implications associated with the practice of profession. This understanding should include more than ethics and jurisprudence, which were traditionally the only aspects of a dentist's knowledge of the law. Appreciation of forensic dental problem's permits clinicians to maintain legally acceptable records and assist legal authorities in the identification of victims of disasters and crimes. Success in this task will assist the dentist should be a medicolegal claim be made and can assist the police and crime detector's in the correct identification of individuals.

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