



# Standard of Practice:

# Informed Consent

2015

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## Introduction

All regulated members of the Alberta Dental Association and College (dentists) must discuss treatment options including no treatment with the patient in order to allow the patient to make an informed choice.

The ethical obligations of dentists with respect to obtaining the informed consent of patients are embodied in the Alberta Dental Association and College Code of Ethics. This document builds on the Code of Ethics and identifies standards for obtaining informed consent.

## Standards for Informed Consent

1. The dentist is responsible and accountable for ensuring that consent is obtained from a patient before performing an examination or treatment, except where permitted by law to act without consent.
2. Consent for examination or treatment may be implied, or may be expressed orally or in writing. A dentist must:
  - a) consider the risks to the patient, the potential for bleeding, infection, pain and discomfort, and the invasiveness of the procedure when deciding on the type of consent required,
  - b) if relying on implied consent, be certain that the actions of the patient would be interpreted by others as having implied permission for the dentist's actions,
  - c) ensure that written consent is obtained before initiating and/or performing treatment of a more complex nature.
3. A dentist must determine a patient's legal and mental capacity to give consent.
4. A dentist who obtains consent from a substitute decision maker on behalf of a patient must comply with applicable laws.
5. A dentist is responsible to ensure that the cost of treatment or procedures is explained to the patient.
6. A dentist must ensure that all of the dentist's staff involved in the informed consent process are given adequate direction and training to perform their functions in the consent process and only delegate the role where there is adequate knowledge and expertise.
7. A dentist must document informed consent in the patient record.
8. Dentist must recognize informed consent is not a onetime event.
  - a) In the case of ongoing care, continuation of consent needs to be verified throughout the treatment period.

- b) When consent is given for a coordinated series of procedures as part of a complex treatment plan, the consent remains valid until that treatment plan is changed or the patient withdraws consent.
  - c) A dentist must respect the right of the patient to withdraw consent at any time.
9. A dentist in obtaining informed consent for treatment must discuss:
- a) The diagnosis or differential diagnosis,
  - b) the exact nature and the anticipated benefits of the proposed procedures, tests or treatments and the cost,
  - c) reasonable and accepted alternative procedures, tests, or treatments that are generally available, including no treatment and their estimated cost,
  - d) the consequences of not undertaking the proposed procedures, tests or treatments,
  - e) the common and significant risks of the proposed procedures, tests or treatments,
  - f) serious risks, even if unlikely,
  - g) future costs of care and life expectancy of treatment,
  - h) special risks, that although uncommon, may have particular relevance to the patient, and
  - i) responses to any questions the patient may have about their medical history and dental treatment.
10. These Standards must be followed by dentists who are members of the Alberta Dental Association and College. Failure to do so constitutes unprofessional conduct and may result in disciplinary action by the Alberta Dental Association and College.