

How to Avoid Complaints

1

Don't practise in isolation

- Actively seek peer feedback through clinical clubs, other educational programs or from colleagues
- Make sure your clinical skills are evaluated
- Stay up to date on College communications

2

Foster a professional office environment

- Treat everyone with respect — and require your staff to do the same
- Always maintain professional boundaries
- Encourage active learning
- For principals of the office: don't delegate responsibility for the office to someone else
- Don't allow staff to fire the patient

3

Know and live the CDSBC Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice

- Post them prominently in the office
- Make sure staff is aware of them
- Make patients aware of them

4

Get informed consent

- Outline all treatment options, risks, benefits and potential complications
- Provide a cost estimate and, if appropriate, a pre-determination from the insurer
- Satisfy yourself that the patient understands the treatment and agrees to it
- Record discussions in the chart and/or a written treatment plan

5

Make good communication a priority

- The dentist should take the time to speak with patients and address any concerns (one hour spent now could save you dozens down the road)
- Encourage patients to be well-informed about their dental care. Make sure the patient is fully informed of cost estimates and what variables might impact the cost to them.
- Do not fire off angry emails/letters
- Use temperate language and remember the 24-hour rule

5 **(Continued) Make good communication a priority**

- Any complex treatment plan should be put in writing and should:
 - Fully set out treatment options: risks and benefits
 - Confirm informed consent – make sure the patient has received an estimate
 - Set out concerns with the treatment chosen (especially if it's not the recommended treatment) and specify the basis of the concerns

6 **If a practice is being sold, notify the patients**

- An introduction from the vendor dentist gets the new dentist/patient relationship off to a good start
- The patient has the right to know if they will be seeing a different dentist, and the right to choose their provider

7 **Don't take on patients you cannot have a good dentist/ patient relationship with**

- The "gut" test: maybe you are not the best dentist for this patient
- Don't agree to a treatment plan you're not comfortable with – you are the professional and can say no

8 **If you need advice, contact a trusted colleague**

- Or you can call our Early Resolution and Practice Advisor

9 **Be proactive**

- If there's a concern, deal with it.
- Develop an office policy for how to deal with unhappy patients. It should include:
 - Expectations of staff demeanor
 - Steps to take to address patient concerns
 - Notifying the dentist
 - Use your website as a tool for communicating office policies with patients

10 **If something happens (and it will), immediately inform the patient and explain what the options are. It's not going to get better by being ignored**

- Create checklists and explanatory materials for patients, e.g. what a patient can expect from procedures you often perform