

Interprofessional Collaboration

Dental hygienists are primary oral health care providers and play an integral role within a patient's/client's circle of care. With a well-documented link of oral health to overall health, there is a need now, more than ever, for dental hygienists to participate in interprofessional collaboration. As such, dental hygienists have a responsibility to develop and maintain professional relationships with other health care professionals to ensure optimal patient/client care outcomes, safe practices and mutual respect and trust.

Interprofessional collaboration can be defined as:

“the process by which professionals reflect on and develop ways of practicing that provides an integrated and cohesive answer to the needs of their client/family/population. This process involves continuous interaction and knowledge sharing between professionals, organized to solve or explore a variety of education and care issues all while seeking to optimize the patient's participation”.¹

All health care professionals must strive to understand, appreciate and respect the roles that they each play in improving a patient's/client's health and well-being. This document is intended as a guide to help dental hygienists work effectively and collaboratively with members of health care teams to ensure that mutual patients/clients are receiving the most complete and optimal care possible.

Respect your role and the role of others in interprofessional client care

Successful collaboration occurs when health care professionals understand one another's disciplines and embrace and support the roles of each profession toward patient/client health. In a healthy interprofessional collaborative relationship, health care professionals set aside egos and communicate respectfully in order to learn from one another.

- Listen, respect and acknowledge the diversity, expertise and contributions of all health care professionals and encourage a client to have other health care professionals involved in their care and decision-making process.
- Use your expertise and knowledge to benefit other health care professionals in helping them establish and meet mutual patient/client goals.
- Understand your limitations.

¹ Interprofessional Education Collaborative Expert Panel. (2011). Core competencies for interprofessional collaborative practice: Report of an expert panel. Washington, D.C.: Interprofessional Education Collaborative

- Share information that addresses the patient's/client's wishes, needs, and best interests as criteria for informing both their perspective, and yours.
- Welcome a second opinion if your patient/client is unsure about treatment options and use this opportunity to learn from hearing a different perspective.

Whatever your role is, in terms of the therapeutic relationship, the patient/client will be counting on you to have a full understanding of his or her treatment plan.

Communicate with each other in a collaborative, responsive and respectful manner

Effective communication and teamwork are essential for creating a “culture of safety”² that supports the safe delivery of patient/client care. Respectful interprofessional communication fosters an environment where a patient/client is able to make well-informed decisions regarding their health care.

- Discuss with your patients/clients, the benefits of sharing information with other health care professionals within their circle of care.
- Use effective and secure communication techniques when requesting or replying to a consultation. Ensure privacy and confidentiality is maintained.
- Respond to requests for copies of reports and records in a professional timely manner. Charging the patient/client a fee for the copies may be acceptable, but the fee should be limited to the actual cost of the copies. Consider providing a copy of the chart for free or at cost.
- When requesting a consultation, recognize that all health care professionals are as busy as you. Set aside time for consultation and provide guidance as to what is the best time to get in touch with you.
- Ensure that consultations run smoothly and efficiently by being prepared before communicating with another health care professional (e.g. client file accessible).
- At the end of each interaction with another health care professional, evaluate how the interaction went and reflect on what could be improved to facilitate or make subsequent interactions more efficient and effective.

Delegation

Delegation can address evolving health care needs by extending authority to perform controlled acts within existing legislative frameworks. Some health professions have the ability to delegate authorized acts to others within their legislation.

- (Giving) Ensure a delegate's performance readiness, competence and ability to manage outcomes before providing a delegation.
- (Receiving) Ensure you are competent before accepting a delegation.

2 Teamwork and Communication Working Group. Improving patient safety with effective teamwork and communication: Literature review needs assessment, evaluation of training tools and expert consultations. Edmonton (AB): Canadian Patient Safety Institute; 2011.

Referrals

Health care professionals work with their patients/clients to establish a plan that includes disease prevention, therapeutic interventions, and overall well-being. Referring to other health care professionals allows all health care needs to be met and ensures optimal outcomes.

- Make a prompt referral to the most appropriate health care professional for diagnosis and treatment when something is beyond your scope of practice or outside your area of knowledge.
- Respect a patient's/client's autonomy and choice when making referrals. If a patient/client has a health care professional they would like to be referred to, respect their wish.
- Include with referrals, appropriate and relevant documentation outlining reasons for the referral.

Be prepared for potential difference of opinion

Differences of opinion may occur in interprofessional collaboration when health care professionals bring their own experience and knowledge to the table. All members of a patient's/client's circle of care have a common goal to provide the best and most effective care possible. Each professional bears the same responsibility to engage collaboratively to determine the treatment that is most appropriate and in the patient's/client's best interests.

- Appreciate that differences can be enriching and can enhance decision making and patient/client care.
- Maintain a respectful dialogue, asking and listening to one another's point of view, always putting the patient's/client's needs first.
- Use this opportunity to educate about your scope of practice and be educated about the other health care professional's scope of practice.

If a difference of opinion cannot be resolved to your satisfaction, do not take any action that you feel will compromise the patient's/client's best interests. You may need to seek additional input from a third party. Document all clinical decisions in the patient/client record in accordance with the CDHO Standards of Practice.

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