

INTERNET GUIDELINES ON DENTAL PRACTICES

THE DENTAL COUNCIL OF HONG KONG

INTRODUCTION

The following guidelines, promulgated by the Dental Council of Hong Kong, should be observed by all dentists in the creation and maintenance of a homepage for private dental practice. Private dental practice includes:-

- (i) a sole practice;
- (ii) a partnership;
- (iii) an associateship; and
- (iv) a practice in the form of a dental company.

A personal web page is also permitted. All dentists should observe the separate guidelines for the creation and maintenance of a personal web page which can be obtained from the Dental Council of Hong Kong.

1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 Although all practices may set up web pages, no such web page shall promote or solicit patients. All forms of communication should be conducted in a manner that is not false or misleading in any respect.
- 1.2 All information placed on such web sites should be legal, decent and truthful, have regard to professional propriety and should not be of a character that could reasonably be regarded as likely to bring the profession into disrepute.
- 1.3 It should not contain any reference to the efficiency, skills or knowledge of the dentist, the equipment used in the practice nor make claims which cannot be substantiated or which suggest superiority over any other dentists or practices.
- 1.4 Subject to section 1.1, practice web pages should have the object of facilitating dissemination of information to the public and should not exploit their lack of experience and knowledge of the range of dental services available to them.
- 1.5 In compliance with the guiding principles on advertising as set out in the Code of Professional Discipline issued by the Dental Council of Hong Kong, information disseminated from the practice web site should not exceed that displayed in the waiting area of a dental practice.

2. CONTEXT OF MISREPRESENTATION OR MISLEADING STATEMENTS

Without prejudice to the general principles in section 1, the following statements are not permitted, being statements which :-

- 2.1 contain a misrepresentation of fact.
- 2.2 are false and misleading.
- 2.3 make or imply any comparison with any other dentist or dentists.
- 2.4 contain any claim of personal pre-eminence in the practice of dentistry or any other matters commanding or directing attention to skills, knowledge, services, equipment or qualifications.
- 2.5 are intended or likely to create an unjustified expectation about results that the dentist can achieve by claiming the use of exclusive or superior apparatus, method or material in the practice of dentistry.
- 2.6 are vulgar, sensational or otherwise such as would likely bring the dentist or the dental profession into disrepute.
- 2.7 mention or state fees for a specific type of service.
- 2.8 contain any other representations or implications which could lead the reader to misunderstand the facts and possibly be deceived.

3. WEB PAGE CONTENT

Web sites for private dental practices are permitted by the Dental Council of Hong Kong provided *only* the following information is contained thereon:

- 3.1 Name of the practice and dental practitioner. In the case of a dental partnership or dental associateship, the names of the partners and associates may be listed.
- 3.2 Photographs of any dentists, associates and enrolled dental hygienists working in the practice.
- 3.3 Qualifications and the year of graduation.
- 3.4 Profession i.e. "Dentist" or "Dental Surgeon", or in the case of a dentist with specialist entitlement given by the Dental Council of Hong Kong, such specialist title.

- 3.5 Address of the practice.
- 3.6 Practice telephone number.
- 3.7 Practice fax number.
- 3.8 Emergency telephone and pager numbers.
- 3.9 Mobile telephone number.
- 3.10 E-mail address.
- 3.11 Consultation hours.
- 3.12 Map showing the exact location of the practice.
- 3.13 Registration Number with the Dental Council.
- 3.14 A Logo which complies with the guidelines on the usage of logo published from time to time by the Dental Council. [Effective from 1 March 2003]

4. ELABORATION OF WEB CONTENT

4.1 Qualifications

Only qualifications registered with the Dental Council of Hong Kong may be mentioned.

4.2 Specialist expertise

No mention of specialist expertise will be allowed except in the case of a dentist who has been authorized by the Dental Council of Hong Kong to use a specialist title. In the case of a dentist who has been allowed by the Council to use a specialist title, only the registered description of the speciality may be mentioned.

4.3 Dental Hygienists

The presence of an enrolled dental hygienist or dental hygienists may be mentioned.

4.4 Published Articles

No mention of any publications or articles written by the practitioner or practitioners of the practice may be made.

5. WARNING/CAUTION

The following Internet applications and technologies are inadmissible. The cardinal rule to apply here is that “any web component or technology that invites or solicits contact with the dental practice is not permitted.”

5.1 Banner Advertisements

These are not permitted and similarly association or links with commercial sites is not permitted.

5.2 Cookies

Use of this technology on the server to obtain an unsolicited database of information about users that login to the web site is not permitted. The Dental Council is concerned that this database may be used to solicit patients.

5.3 Newsgroups

These are inadmissible in any form.

5.4 Active Channels/Push technology/Broadcast channel technology

These are inadmissible in any form.

5.5 Listservers

The setting up of a listserver by any dental practice in Hong Kong at present is not allowed. But a listserver is allowed to be used within the profession.

5.6 “Ask a dentist” or “Sections that invite Public Queries on Dentistry”

This is not permitted.

5.7 Association with commercial/promotional sites

There must be no association with commercial/promotional sites both non-dentally or dentally related. Hyperlinks or any other forms of linking to or from these sites are not permitted. However, linking and or subscription to a dental database of dentists is permitted *only* if that database contains *all* registered dentists in Hong Kong.

5.8 Guestbooks

Guestbooks or areas or forms to collect details of people who login to the web site are strictly inadmissible.

5.9 Bulk or Mass E-mailings

It is not permitted for dentists to make use of electronic media, in the form of e-mail, Internet Broadcast Channels in the form of “Push” technology or the use of any electronic Internet technology to mass distribute electronic leaflets, brochures, pamphlets or letters intended for the public at large.

The only time when Bulk/Mass E-mailing will be permitted by a dental practice will be to bona fide patients of the practice and under one or more of the following circumstances:-

- (i) the commencement of practice.
- (ii) taking over the practice of another dentist or that another dentist has taken over his/her practice (with the consent of the second party).
- (iii) a dentist has entered into or dissolved partnership with another dentist.
- (iv) notice of removal of practice to new premises.
- (v) has ceased practice.

Any dentists of a dental practice in sending e-mail should avoid the following:

(i) Solicitation

Soliciting patients through distribution of e-mail circulars, e-mail pamphlets whether personally, by canvassers or agents is strictly forbidden.

(ii) As an ex-employee

Having been an employee of another dental practice either during or after the termination of such employment, sends or authorises to be sent, any e-mail letter to any person whom he/she (the employee) has professionally attended to.

(iii) E-mail canvassing

The use of unsolicited e-mail to promote a practice would be unacceptable and deemed likely to diminish public confidence in the profession and bring the profession into disrepute.

5.10 Links to Personal Web Pages

There should be no links whatsoever to personal web pages or vice versa.

5.11 Links to Oral Health Education Web Pages

There should be no links whatsoever to oral health education web pages.

6. Conclusion

Any Internet technology that in any form may lead to solicitation or deemed to imply or be associated with any form of solicitation or touting or provide an unfair advantage over other dentists is inadmissible on web pages.

If there is any ethical aspect not covered by these brief guidelines, dentists are advised to consult the Code of Professional Discipline of the Dental Council of Hong Kong. Dentists are welcomed to give views to the Dental Council should they become aware of new development in internet technology that may be of relevance to the guidelines on internet homepages.

It is hoped that these guidelines will enable dentists in Hong Kong to set up acceptable web pages. These guidelines will be updated on a regular basis to encompass the latest Internet technologies as they become available.

*The Dental Council of Hong Kong
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