



Poster Board 10:

Designing Professional Guidance that Supports Access to Oral Health Care for All - The Dental Regulator's Journey

Presenters:

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Description:

How can dentistry help the people who face the most barriers? As the regulator for Ontario's dentists, the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario (RCDSO) is taking steps to help reduce the barriers patients face when accessing dental care. We want to hear your point of view on what would make the most difference in your community as we design future professional expectation documents for Ontario's dentists. Improving access to dental care is a complex issue and our future guidance will help inform dentists about the ways they can offer safe, inclusive, equitable, and accessible oral health care for all Ontarians.

Poster Board objectives and learning outcomes:

- Examine the barriers Ontario patients experience in accessing oral health care and the areas where the RCDSO is taking steps to reduce those barriers.
- Review the RCDSO's process for developing new professional expectation documents for dentists and explore the ways communities can get involved in public engagement opportunities and consultations that help inform this work.
- Discuss what you expect of dentists when it comes to accepting new patients and professionalism - directly contribute to the design of two future RCDSO documents.

Full description:

As acknowledged by the [Alliance for Healthier Communities](#), oral health care in Canada is marked by deep inequalities and it is closely linked the social determinants of health (the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age). [Research](#) indicates that the following underserved patient populations experience the greatest oral health inequalities: those with low incomes, young children living in low-income families, Indigenous peoples, refugees and immigrants, people living with disabilities, seniors, and people living in rural and remote regions. Lack of access to dental care can lead to negative impacts on an individual's overall health and well-being, including pain and discomfort, difficulty eating, and loss of opportunity ([Canadian Academy of Health Sciences, 2014](#)).

Improving access to oral health care has been a priority for the Royal College of Dental Surgeons (RCDSO) for many years. Our early work focused on information sharing and education, including developing resources for the public and increasing continuing education opportunities and resources for dentists related to the provision of accessible care and professionalism, and engagement with health system partners. As we continue to explore the role dentists can play in supporting patient access to oral health care, we are currently developing new RCDSO documents that set out dentists' roles and responsibilities concerning accepting new patients and professionalism. We're exploring integrating concepts related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility into these new documents to help address barriers at the practice-level that impact patients' ability to receive safe, inclusive, equitable, and accessible care that is free from discrimination.

We are planning to seek broad input from communities into the development of these new documents. Hearing the voices of patients, caregivers, CHC staff, patient advocates, social workers, dentists, and other healthcare providers will strengthen the design and success of these final documents.

Our consultation and engagement strategies include:

- Holding two external consultations on issues related to accepting new patients and professionalism at two different times within the policy development process (early on to help us draft these documents, and later on the draft documents themselves). We want to understand and reflect what patients and the public expect of dentists in our documents.
- Adding new, voluntary, and anonymous demographic questions to our consultation surveys to help us determine who we are hearing from (and who we aren't hearing from) so we can seek out and hear diverse perspectives. We want to help ensure that our documents reflect the diverse voices of Ontario.
- Creating an Advisory Group, comprised of representatives from organizations that represent a variety of communities and patient populations. This is a new addition to our regular policy development process and we're envisioning the Advisory Group playing a key role in the development process by sharing their diverse perspectives with the policy drafters and decision-makers.
- Looking for opportunities to present our work and connect with patients, health care providers, and other interested parties at conferences and other external events to build connections with different communities to hear input to help us draft these documents.

- We'd like to connect with those who are experiencing barriers accessing oral health care, and with the health care providers and administrators who see these barriers in their work.
- We also want to understand what patients and the public expect of dentists so we can set out expectations and guidance for dentists in regard to providing safe, inclusive, equitable, and accessible care for all.

As part of our organizational commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion, we are also connecting with diverse communities to learn. Deepening our connections and understanding more broadly will help us consider different experiences and perspectives in our regulatory work.