



# Importance of Good Dentist/Patient Communications in the Informed Consent Process

*Good communication is essential to maintaining your relationship with your patients and is vitally important to obtaining your patients' consent to treatment.*

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Patients frequently contact the College about treatment plan options or the cost of dental treatment. Some examples of these inquiries include:

- Patients call to request information about whether alternative types of treatment are possible. These patients often state that their dentists offered them only one option.
- Patients ask such questions as “What is root canal treatment?” When asked why they are not speaking directly with their dentists, they often reply that it is difficult to talk to them.
- Some patients call with questions when treatment has failed. When asked why they haven't discussed their questions with their dentists, many of these patients say that their dentists are too busy to talk with them.
- Many patients call with questions about the cost of a specific dental treatment. Those who are angry about the cost of treatment that they have received invariably say that their dentists or staff did not discuss the cost of treatment before the beginning of treatment.

## *Exciting News! Informed Consent Focus of Latest Education Package*

The latest production in the College's LifeLong Learning program will deal specifically with the topic of informed consent. Production of the CD is a collaborative project with the Ontario Dental Association. Distribution is slated for October.

### **Highlights include:**

- Dramatization of dentist/patient scenarios, dentist/patient discussions with their lawyers, and an in-court sequence with a decision delivered by a real judge
- Case studies based on real life problems in different specialties
- Informed consent checklists for dentist's use
- Roundtable review of case studies by leading lawyers

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Remember that dentists are required both legally and ethically to obtain their patients' informed consent to treatment. Your treatment planning consultations should include a discussion of the diagnosis and rationale for treatment, and the risks, benefits, expected outcomes, and costs of the different reasonable treatment options.

Some dentists make use of visual aids like diagrams or models to help them explain different dental procedures to their patients. Some dentists provide their patients with brochures or pamphlets to read, or let them view videos after the treatment planning consultation.

To ensure that the consent process is complete:

- Make sure to use language and terminology that your patients will understand.
- Make sure that you give your patients the opportunity to ask questions.
- Give your patients adequate time to consider the treatment plan options so they don't feel pressured into consenting to treatment. Patients often come back with additional questions. Sometimes these questions will show that your patients didn't truly understand what you said at their initial consultations.
- Be sure to document the discussion between you and your patient including your patient's consent to treatment.