



CPD4dentalnurses

YOUR FUTURE IN YOUR HANDS

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Aims: To provide the dental professional with an understanding of the importance of equality and diversity in the dental practice.

Objectives: On completion of this verifiable CPD article the participant will be able to demonstrate, through completion of a questionnaire, the ability to:

- Understand the definition of equality in a dental setting
- Understand the definition of diversity in dentistry
- Understand the definition of inclusion within dental practice
- Understand the meaning of cultural competence in dental care
- Identify the laws surrounding equality and diversity
- Be able to identify the 9 protected characteristics and understand how to tailor care according to people's individual needs
- Be able to recognise discrimination and identify risks of discrimination
- Know how to comply with the GDC Standards on equality and diversity
- Recognise the importance of training for the dental team in communication with people with learning disabilities
- Recognise the importance of Principle 8 of the GDC Standards to raise concerns if patients are at risk and the importance of having a Whistle Blowing procedure in place

Introduction

Equality, diversity and inclusion in dental practice refers to the principles and practices that promote fair and inclusive treatment of patients and staff regardless of their background, characteristics, or abilities. It involves ensuring everyone receives the same quality of care and has equal opportunities within the dental setting.

Within the dental practice, there is the need to eliminate discrimination, reduce inequalities and help ensure that the patients' individual care needs are met. Dental providers have a responsibility to ensure that the people using the dental service are treated with dignity and respect. In addition, it is necessary to foster a workplace environment that is inclusive and honours individuality, human dignity and equality.

This article will discuss the definitions and laws surrounding equality and diversity in the workplace and outline the relevant General Dental Council (GDC) and Care Quality Commission (CQC) regulations surrounding the subject to ensure that patients are treated with dignity and respect and are not discriminated against.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion



Equality is about fostering everybody's right to be different, ensuring that people are treated fairly and equally. This means that everyone is free from discrimination, is valued as an individual, has choice and dignity and has a right to their own beliefs and values.¹

Diversity means varied and different and encompasses recognising and valuing that every individual is unique. Valuing diversity involves accepting and respecting individual differences, for example differences in religion, beliefs or race.²



Diversity can be remembered as being:

Different
Individuals
Valuing
Each other
Regardless of
Skin
Intellect
Talents or
Years¹

Inclusion means creating environments where all individuals feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued. It also involves ensuring they can participate fully in decision-making, regardless of their background.

- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation⁴

The Care Act 2014

This legislation provides six key principles which should underpin all work with vulnerable adults. This includes ensuring that adults receive support that's personal to them, chosen by them and has their consent.

The Mental Capacity Act 2005

This Act provides a legal framework setting out the key principles, procedures and safeguards to protect and empower those who are unable to make their own decisions. This could include people with learning difficulties, dementia, mental health problems, strokes or head injuries. (A CPD article on the Mental Capacity Act is available on the website).

General Data Protection Regulations (2018)

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) is a legal framework that sets guidelines for the collection and processing of personal information of individuals within the European Union (EU). (A CPD article on GDPR is available on the website).

Human Rights Act 1998



This legislation outlines the basic human rights and principles of equality. The human rights approach to clinical practice has been defined as “one where the realisation of human rights principles is a central aim in policy and planning, where staff and patients

are empowered and involved in achieving these, where accountability is clear and the most vulnerable groups are prioritised.”⁵

The ‘FREDA’ acronym helps you to remember some human rights principles that are covered by the Act:

- Fairness
- Respect
- Equality
- Dignity
- Autonomy

The Care Quality Commission have also added two further principles to their human rights approach: the human rights article of right to life, and a principle of staff rights and empowerment. The CQC state that state that, “we need a human rights approach because respecting diversity, promoting equality and ensuring human rights helps to make sure that everyone using health and social care services receives good quality care.”⁶

Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014 (as amended)

Regulation 10: Dignity and Respect



The intention of regulation 10 is to ensure that people using the service are always treated with respect and dignity when they are receiving care and treatment. To meet this requirement, dental practices will need to provide evidence that they “provide care and treatment in a way that ensures people’s dignity and treats them with respect at all times.” This includes making sure that they have privacy when they want it and that they are treated as equals. It also puts emphasis on having regard to any relevant protected characteristics (as defined in section 149 (7) of the Equality Act 2010).

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) must refuse registration if the provider cannot provide evidence that they can and will continue to comply with the regulation. ⁷

Health and Care Act 2022

The main purpose of the Health and Care Act is to establish a legislative framework that supports collaboration and partnership-working to integrate services

for patients. Among a wide range of other measures, the Act also includes targeted changes to public health, social care and the oversight of quality and safety.

The Act introduces significant changes to how the NHS in England is organised to promote integrated care, building on existing work to join up services and remove barriers that were getting in the way of this. The legislation is deliberately flexible to enable local discretion.

Providers must have regard to the following guidance that is applicable to dental practice:

- When people receive care and treatment, all staff must treat them with dignity and respect at all times. This includes staff treating them in a caring and compassionate way.
- All communication with people using services must be respectful. This includes using or facilitating the most suitable means of communication and respecting a person's right to engage or not to engage in communication.
- Staff must respect people's personal preferences, lifestyle and care choices.
- People using the service should be addressed in the way they prefer.

Dental practices should have an Equality and Diversity policy which should be reviewed annually.

[General Dental Council Standards](#)



GDC registrants have a responsibility to adhere to the standards, principles and guidance outlined in the GDC Standards handbook. The following guidance is applicable to equality and diversity⁸:

Principle One: Put Patients' Interests First

Standard 1.1 You must listen to your patients

1.1.1 You must discuss treatment options with patients and listen carefully to what they say. Give them the opportunity to have a discussion and to ask questions.

Standard 1.2 You must treat every patient with dignity and respect at all times

1.2.1 You should be aware of how your tone of voice and body language might be perceived.

1.2.2 You should take patients' preferences into account and be sensitive to their individual needs and values.

1.2.3 You must treat patients with kindness and compassion.

1.2.4 You should manage patients' dental pain and anxiety appropriately

Standard 1.6 You must treat patients fairly, as individuals and without discrimination.

1.6.1 You must not discriminate against patients on the grounds of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation.

You must also ensure that you do not discriminate against patients or groups of patients for any other reasons such as nationality, special needs, health, lifestyle or any other consideration.

1.6.2 You must be aware of and adhere to all your responsibilities as set out in relevant equalities legislation.

1.6.3 You must consider patients' disabilities and make reasonable adjustments to allow them to receive care which meets their needs. If you cannot make reasonable adjustments to treat a patient safely, you should consider referring them to a colleague.

1.6.4 You must not express your personal beliefs (including political, religious or moral beliefs) to patients in any way that exploits their vulnerability or could cause them distress.

Principle Two: Communicate Effectively with Patients

Standard 2.1 You must communicate effectively with patients – listen to them, give them time to consider information and take their individual views and communication needs into account.

2.1.1 You must treat patients as individuals. You should take their specific communication needs and preferences into account where possible and respect any cultural values and differences.

2.1.2 You must be sufficiently fluent in written and spoken English to communicate effectively with patients, their relatives, the dental team and other healthcare professionals in the United Kingdom.

Standard 2.3 You must give patients the information they need, in a way they can understand, so that they can make informed decisions.

2.3.1 You should introduce yourself to patients and explain your role so that they know how you will be involved in their care.

2.3.2 Other members of your team may have valuable knowledge about the patients' backgrounds or concerns so you should involve them (and the patients' carers if relevant) in discussion with patients where appropriate.

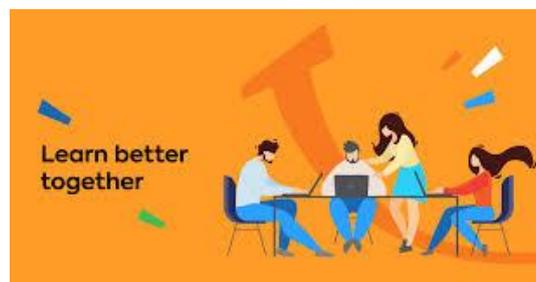
2.3.3 You should recognise patients' communication difficulties and try to meet the patients' particular communication needs by, for example:

- Not using professional jargon and acronyms;
- Using an interpreter for patients whose first language is not English;
- Suggesting that patients bring someone with them who can use sign language; and
- Providing an induction loop to help patients who wear hearing aids.

2.3.4 You should satisfy yourself that patients have understood the information you have given them, for example by asking questions and summarising the main points of your discussion.

2.3.5 You should make sure that patients have enough information and enough time to ask questions and make a decision.⁸

Learning Disability and the need for Team Training



The NHS estimates there are around 1.5 million people in the UK with a learning disability. It is thought that up to 350,000 people have a severe learning disability and this figure is increasing.

The Health and Care Act 2022 has introduced the need for mandatory training on learning disability and autism in all healthcare settings (this is available as a full CPD article on the website).

The Equality Act 2010 says that services must make reasonable adjustments so that people with additional needs receive the care they need – just like everyone else.

The CQC has stated that it will provide a regulatory approach to all service advisers, including dental practices, to see that staff have received the appropriate training, to ensure that patients' needs are met, and that training is completed appropriate to the individual's role. The new regulation comes under regulation 18: Staffing. The two specific points about the new requirement are:

- “You must ensure that all staff receive training in how to interact appropriately with people with a learning disability and autistic people, at a level appropriate to their role.
- Staff must receive appropriate supervision in their role to ensure they demonstrate and maintain competence and understanding in the needs of people with a learning disability and autistic people, including how to support them in the best way.”⁹

What is Discrimination?



Discrimination comes in many different forms:

1) Direct Discrimination

Direct discrimination is when a person is treated differently because of a protected characteristic that they have or are thought to have.

Example: Person A does not get offered a promotion because they are older or the practice manager thinks it may be a problem for other staff members that they are older, even though they have the skills and competencies required.

2) Indirect Discrimination

Indirect discrimination is where a policy applies to everyone but has a disproportional impact on some people. For example, to have a practice policy to be clean shaven would indirectly discriminate against someone if their religious belief does not allow them to shave.

3) Associative Discrimination

Associative discrimination occurs when someone suffers discrimination because of their association with someone with a protected characteristic. For example, if

someone is discriminated against because they are thought to be less reliable because they have a disabled child.

4) Perception Discrimination

Perception discrimination is where someone discriminates against a person because they believe they have a protected characteristic, even if they do not. For example, a person being treated differently because others incorrectly assume they belong to a particular religion (for example, a colleague or patient with a beard being treated differently because they are mistakenly assumed to be Muslim).

5) Harassment and bullying



Discrimination sometimes takes the form of harassment or bullying. These can include:

- Threats
- Jokes
- Gestures
- Sexual advances or unwanted suggested sexual behaviour
- Aggressive physical behaviour
- Repeated behaviour that a person has previously objected to

Although there is no legal definition of workplace bullying, experts believe that bullying involves negative behaviour being targeted at an individual, or individuals repeatedly and persistently over time.¹

Responsibility

Everyone in the dental team has a responsibility to guard against any form of discrimination and has a responsibility to ensure that there is no discrimination in any of their decisions or behaviours towards other colleagues or patients. This involves being committed to reporting any discriminatory acts or practices, cooperating with any measures introduced to ensure equality of opportunity. The practice equality and diversity policy should be followed and there must be a complaints policy in place for patients. (A full complaints article is available on the website.)

Any incidents should be recorded and learnt from. The practice confidentiality policy should also be adhered to.

Dental professionals have a moral responsibility to help create a positive, safe workplace. If someone in the practice is experiencing harassment or bullying, you must report it.

Whistleblowing

Principle 8 of the GDC standards highlights the importance of raising concerns if patients are at risk and expects registrants to act quickly if there are any concerns about patient welfare, the practice environment, or the health performance or behaviour of a dental professional. The practice should have a culture where staff are able to raise concerns openly and that there is an appropriate procedure in place for doing so. Further information on whistleblowing can be obtained by reading principle 8 of the GDC Standards guidance which can be downloaded at the end of this article.⁸

Demonstrating Equality and Diversity in your Dental Practice



As previously discussed, there are 9 Protected characteristics. To demonstrate diversity, practices need to demonstrate respect for individual beliefs, values, cultures and lifestyles.

The following section describes each protected characteristic that is set out in the Equality Act 2010 and provides, an example of how the dental practice can demonstrate that all service users can access the same opportunities, regardless of their lifestyle, ability or background.



1) Age

This refers to a person's age or the age group they belong to, which can include specific age ranges like "over 50s" or "young adults."

Example in a Dental Setting: A dental practice ensures that older patients have access to dental chairs that accommodate limited mobility, and schedules longer appointment times for elderly patients who may need more time for procedures.

2) Disability

A physical or mental condition that has a substantial and long-term impact on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Examples in a Dental Setting: The practice provides a ramp for access to the building for a patient in a wheelchair. An induction loop is available to a patient with a hearing impairment.

3) Gender Reassignment

This refers to individuals who are undergoing, have undergone, or are planning to undergo a process to change their gender identity, whether it involves surgery or not.

Example in a Dental Setting: A patient who is transitioning from female to male or vice versa is treated with respect and addressed by their chosen name and gender pronoun by all dental staff.

4) Marriage and Civil Partnership

This protects individuals who are married or in a civil partnership from discrimination based on their relationship status.

Example in a Dental Setting: A dental practice ensures that married employees or those in civil partnerships have equal access to benefits, such as family dental insurance plans, without any bias compared to single employees.

5) Pregnancy and Maternity

This covers women who are pregnant, on maternity leave, or have recently given birth, protecting them from discrimination in employment and services.

Example in a Dental Setting: A pregnant patient is given priority for appointments that minimise waiting times and is offered additional support for managing pregnancy-related oral health issues, such as pregnancy gingivitis.

6) Race

This includes a person's colour, nationality, and ethnic or national origin.

Example in a Dental Setting: A dental practice offers information and patient education materials in multiple languages that reflect the diverse ethnic backgrounds of its patient population, ensuring everyone has access to the same level of care.

7) Religion or Belief

This covers religious and philosophical beliefs, including a lack of belief (e.g., atheism).

Example in a Dental Setting: A Muslim patient requests an appointment time that allows them to perform their prayers. The practice accommodates this request by scheduling their appointment outside of prayer times.

8) Sex

This refers to a person's biological sex – male or female.

Example in a Dental Setting: A dental practice provides equal access to treatment and does not prioritise male patients over female patients or vice versa when booking appointments or providing care.

9) Sexual Orientation

This refers to a person's sexual orientation towards people of the same sex, opposite sex, or both sexes.

Example in a Dental Setting: A same-sex couple visits the dentist together. The staff treat them with the same level of respect and courtesy as they would any other couple, ensuring that both partners are recognised and addressed appropriately.

These examples demonstrate how each protected characteristic can manifest in a dental setting and highlight the importance of creating an inclusive environment that respects the diversity of both patients and staff.

Equality and diversity in the dental practice could also be demonstrated in the following ways:

- A proactive approach to understanding the needs and preferences of different groups of people.
- Inclusive hiring practices which actively seeks to hire staff from diverse backgrounds. This can include different genders, ethnicities, ages and abilities.
- Providing equal opportunities in the dental practice for training, promotion and career development, regardless of personal characteristic such as gender, race or disability.

- Providing a work culture that promotes fairness and equal opportunity for all where staff feel respected, valued and supported.
- Ensuring the practice provides patient centred care where patient's needs and preferences are considered and acted on.
- Providing care that is accessible and promotes equality. This includes people with protected characteristics.
- Making reasonable adjustments to care where necessary and take action to remove barriers when individuals find it hard to access services in order to accommodate individual needs. This can encompass access and the use of alternative methods of communication.
- Treating patients with kindness and compassion, respecting their choices and being sensitive to their individual needs and values.
- Allowing patients space and time to make decisions.
- Demonstrate that staff have received training in equality and diversity and are familiar with the practice's equality and diversity policy.
- Evidence of discussions on equality and diversity in staff meetings and reflections on events.
- Collecting feedback from patients about their experience regarding equality and diversity and using this to make continuous improvements.
- The practice should have a whistleblowing policy.

Conclusion

All dental professionals have a responsibility to eliminate discrimination and reduce inequalities, responding appropriately to diverse needs and requirements to ensure that patient needs are met. Equality and diversity are fundamental principles that should be at the core of dental practice. By embracing these principles, dental professionals can eliminate discrimination, understand diverse patient needs, and develop cultural competence, all of which contribute to patient satisfaction and oral health outcomes. Moreover, promoting diversity in the workplace fosters a positive work environment that nurtures teamwork and professionalism. The dental practice should have an equality and diversity policy which should be adhered to.

Personal Development Plan and Reflective Learning

This CPD is linked to the following GDC Enhanced CPD Development Outcomes:

- A. Effective communication with patients, the dental team and others across dentistry, including when obtaining consent, dealing with complaints, and raising concerns when patients are at risk.**
- B. Effective management of self and effective management of others or effective work with others in the dental team, in the interests of patients; providing constructive leadership where appropriate.**
- D. Maintenance of skills, behaviours and attitudes which maintain patient confidence in you and the dental profession and put patients' interests first.**

You will now be given the opportunity to answer some reflective learning questions, before your certificate is generated. You can update this at any time from your CPD log. If you take a few moments to write your reflection on completion, you will have fulfilled the Enhanced CPD requirements.

Further Reading

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: Open your Mind. This is a very powerful video on equality and diversity and is well worth a viewing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q6eqOBOqESM>

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