



# **CODE OF ETHICS of the ORAL HYGIENISTS' ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA**

## **Note:**

By becoming a member of OHASA (hereinafter referred to as "the Association") you agree and bind yourself to adhere to and to act in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of the Association, the Code of Conduct and the Code of Ethics and recognise that disciplinary measures can be taken against you if you do not adhere to/act in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution, Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics, as amended from time to time.

The provisions of the Constitution, Code of Conduct and Code of Ethics may be amended from time to time. The amendments will be adopted and made effective according to the necessary procedures prescribed in the Constitution.

The Code of Ethics will in certain respects overlap with the Code of Conduct. The documents must therefore be read in conjunction with each other as they function together and form an integral part of one another.

In the event of a conflict between the provisions of the Code of Conduct, the Code of Ethics and the Constitution of the Association, the provisions of the Constitution will prevail.

## **1 PREAMBLE**

As oral hygienists, we are a community of professionals devoted to the prevention of disease and the promotion and improvement of the public's health. We are preventive oral health professionals who provide educational, clinical and therapeutic services to the public. We strive to live meaningful, productive, satisfying lives that simultaneously serve us, our profession, our society and the world. Our actions, behaviours and attitudes are consistent with our commitment to public services. We endorse and incorporate the Code of Ethics into our daily lives.

## **2 PURPOSE**

The purpose of a professional code of ethics is to achieve high levels of ethical consciousness, decision making and practice by the members of the profession. Specific objectives of the Oral Hygiene Code of Ethics are:

2.1 to increase our professional and ethical consciousness and sense of ethical

- responsibility;
- 2.2 to lead us to recognize ethical issues and choices and to guide us in making more informed ethical decisions;
  - 2.3 to establish a standard for professional judgement and conduct, and
  - 2.4 to provide a statement of the ethical behaviour the public can expect from us.

The Oral Hygiene Code of Ethics is meant to influence us throughout our careers. It stimulates our continuing study of ethical issues and challenges us to explore our ethical responsibilities. The Code establishes concise standards of behaviour to guide the public's expectations of our profession and supports existing oral hygiene practice, laws and regulations. By holding ourselves accountable to meeting the standards stated in the Code, we enhance the public's trust on which our professional privilege and status are founded.

### **3 KEY CONCEPTS**

Our beliefs, principles, values and ethics are concepts reflected in the Code. They are the essential elements of our comprehensive and definitive code of ethics and are interrelated and mutually dependent.

### **4 BASIC BELIEFS**

We recognize the importance of the following beliefs that guide our practice and provide context for our ethics:

- 4.1 the service we provide contributes to the health and well being of society;
- 4.2 our education and licensure qualify us to serve the public by preventing and treating oral disease and helping individuals achieve and maintain optimal oral health;
- 4.3 individuals have intrinsic worth, are responsible for their own health and are entitled to make choices regarding their health;
- 4.4 oral hygiene care is an essential component of overall healthcare;
- 4.5 all people should have access to healthcare, including oral healthcare, and
- 4.6 we are individually responsible for our actions and the quality of care we provide.

### **5 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES**

These fundamental principles, universal concepts and general laws of conduct provide the foundation for our ethics.

#### **5.1 Universality**

The principle of universality assumes that, if one individual judges an action to be right or wrong in a given situation, other people considering the same action in the same situation would make the same judgement.

#### **5.2 Complementarity**

The principle of complementarity assumes the existence of an obligation to justice and basic human rights. It requires us to act toward others in the same way they would act toward us if roles were reversed. In all

relationships, it means considering the values and perspective of others before making decisions or taking actions affecting them.

### 5.3 **Ethics**

Ethics are the general standards of right and wrong that guide behaviour within society. As generally accepted actions, they can be judged by determining the extent to which they promote good and minimize harm. Ethics compel us to engage in health promotion/disease prevention activities.

### 5.4 **Community**

This principle expresses our concern for the bond between individuals, the community and society in general. It leads us to preserve natural resources and inspires us to show concern for the global environment.

### 5.5 **Responsibility**

Responsibility is central to our ethics. We recognize that there are guidelines for making ethical choices and accept responsibility for knowing and applying them. We accept the consequences of our actions or the failure to act and are willing to make ethical choices and publicly affirm them.

### 5.6 **Ubuntu**

(Zulu pronunciation: [ùbúnt'ù]) is a Nguni Bantu term meaning "humanity." It is often translated as "I am because we are," or "humanity towards others," but is often used in a more philosophical sense to mean "the belief in a universal bond of sharing that connects all humanity."

## 6 **CORE VALUES**

We acknowledge these values as general guides for our choices and actions.

### 6.1 **Individual autonomy and respect for human beings**

People have the right to be treated with respect. They have the right to informed consent prior to treatment and they have the right to full disclosure of all relevant information so that they can make informed choices about their care.

### 6.2 **Confidentiality**

We respect the confidentiality of patient information and relationships as a demonstration of the value we place on individual autonomy. We acknowledge our obligation to justify any violation of a confidence.

### 6.3 **Societal Trust**

We value patient trust and understand that public trust in our profession is based on our actions and behaviour.

### 6.4 **Nonmaleficence**

We accept our fundamental obligation to provide services in a manner that protects all patients and minimizes harm to them and others involved in their treatment.

### 6.5 **Beneficence**

We have a primary role in promoting the well being of individuals and the public by engaging in health promotion/disease prevention activities.

### 6.6 **Justice and Fairness**

We value justice and support the fair and equitable distribution of healthcare resources. We believe all people should have access to high-quality, affordable oral healthcare.

**6.7 Veracity**

We accept our obligation to tell the truth and assume that others will do the same, and seek truth and honesty in all relationships.

**7 STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY**

We are obligated to practice our profession in a manner that supports our purpose, beliefs and values in accordance with the fundamental principles that support our ethics. We acknowledge that we have responsibilities to:

- 7.1 Patients;
- 7.2 Ourselves and Professionals;
- 7.3 Colleagues;
- 7.4 Employees and Employers;
- 7.5 The Oral Hygiene Profession;
- 7.6 Family and Friends;
- 7.7 The Community and Society, and
- 7.8 Scientific Investigation.