

Talking Ethics



That's What Friends Are For?

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One of your close friends is having difficulty completing her continuing competency requirements for her regulatory college. The deadline to submit proof of completion of professional development activities is looming. Your friend knows that you have successfully completed an online course that she is currently enrolled in but does not have the time to complete on her own. She asks you to sign into the exam under her ID and complete the exam for her. She promises to learn all of the material once her life circumstances change.

Ethical challenges appear in our personal and professional lives. They undoubtedly create tension between our allegiance to a friend and our professional responsibilities. Let's examine this scenario through the lens of the CDHA Code of Ethics.

PRINCIPLE: BENEFICENCE

"Beneficence involves caring about and acting to promote the good of another".¹ There is a danger in not reading beyond this point in the code. You might think that helping your friend is actually upholding the principle of beneficence, as you are doing a favour because you care about her. It is important to read the rest of the definition, however, which says, "Dental hygienists use their knowledge and skills to assist clients to achieve and maintain optimal oral health and overall wellbeing, and to promote fair and reasonable access to quality oral health services as an integral part of the healthcare system".¹ Beneficence refers to assisting clients. By taking the exam for your friend, you are enabling her to practice, contrary to the rules and regulations of our profession, not to mention allowing her to practice without the necessary skills and expertise required to provide optimal client care.

PRINCIPLE: INTEGRITY

By voicing her request, your friend has actually asked you to neglect your responsibility under this principle. Responsibility 6 under the principle of Integrity states that "Dental hygienists promote workplace practices and policies that facilitate professional practice in accordance with the principles, standards, laws and regulations under which they are accountable".¹ Both you and your friend would be violating this principle.

PRINCIPLE: ACCOUNTABILITY

This principle clearly outlines the fact that, as professionals, dental hygienists are responsible for knowing the regulations under which they practice. Ignorance is not a defence. This principle also states under responsibility 6, that "dental hygienists inform their employers and/or appropriate regulatory authority of unethical practice by a colleague".¹ In fact, if you agree to take the examination for your friend, you will be equally guilty of unethical practice. A much better approach would be to discuss the Code of Ethics with your friend and determine how you might assist her in resolving her current situation.

Perhaps instead of agreeing to complete the examination on behalf of your friend, you might suggest working through "Appendix B: Guidelines for ethical decision making." This step-by-step process can assist you in coming to a satisfactory resolution. For example, you and she could set up a series of study sessions so that you can help her complete the course material. You could offer to work some shifts in her place or to take care of her children on a couple of Saturdays to free up some study time if that would be helpful. Regardless of the type of assistance you offer, by refusing to take the exam in her place, you will demonstrate ethical courage and can feel confident that you have upheld the principles in your professional code of ethics.

It is important to ensure that you are adhering to all five principles: Beneficence, Autonomy, Integrity, Accountability, and Confidentiality. Review the Code of Ethics on a regular basis and work through the ethical dilemmas or develop some of your own. Your decision not to take the examination on your friend's behalf may strain your relationship with her and will certainly take a little extra effort. Ultimately, however, you will be satisfied with the decisions that you have made. We all need somebody to lean on at different times in our life, so be a supportive colleague without regrets.

Reference

1. Canadian Dental Hygienists Association. *CDHA Dental Hygienists' Code of Ethics*, revised June 2012. Ottawa, ON: CDHA; 2012.