

Talking Ethics



The Strength of Our Professional Advocacy Serves the Vulnerable Members of Society

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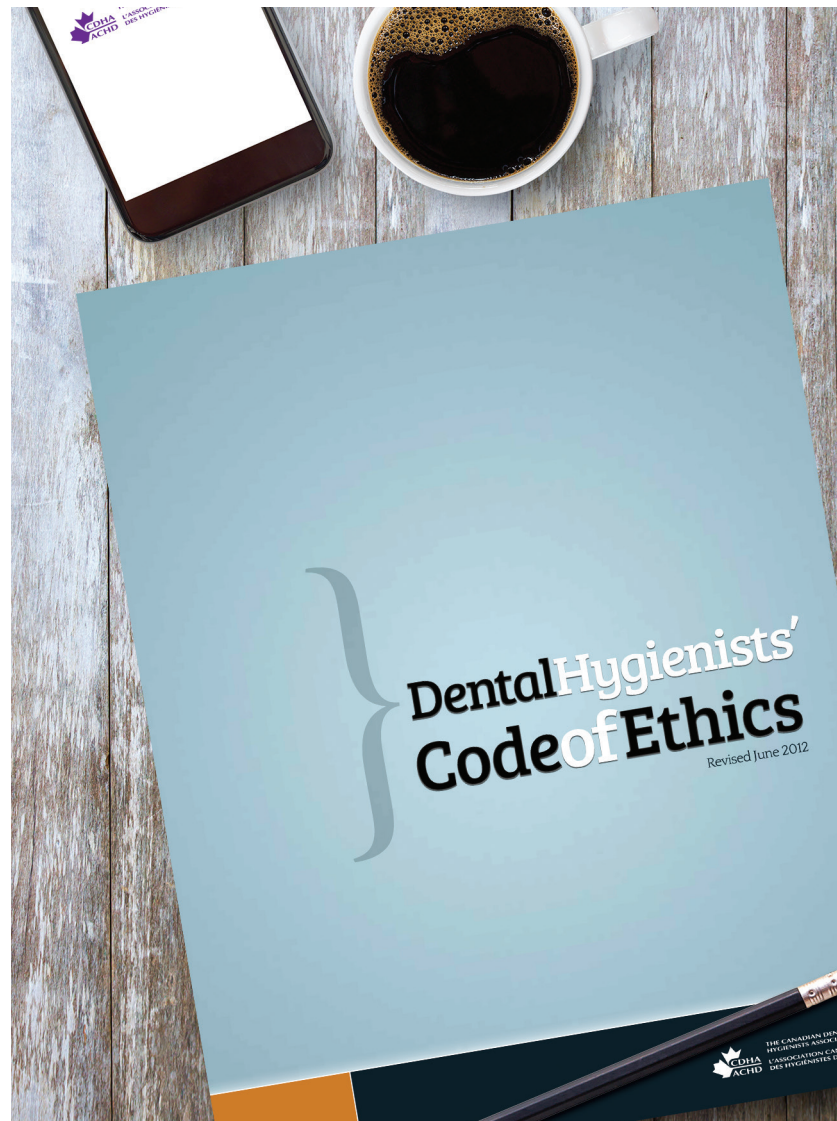
Canada's new federal dental care program ranks highest in the ongoing advocacy work of the Canadian Dental Hygienists Association (CDHA) on behalf of the profession and vulnerable people in Canada.¹ The theme of this issue of *Oh Canada!* is "Treating vulnerable populations," including medically compromised clients, clients in remote communities, and seniors.

SELF-REFLECTION: START WITH A CLEAR DEFINITION

The National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health defines vulnerable populations as "groups and communities at a higher risk for poor health as a result of the barriers they experience to social, economic, political, and environmental resources, as well as limitations due to illness or disability."² What vulnerable populations can you identify in your community? Medically compromised Canadians now include those living with post-COVID-19 conditions, also known as long COVID, which has emerged as a complex and multisystem disease that is anticipated to require multidisciplinary management and treatment across the continuum of care.³ How many members of your community are challenged with barriers and obstacles to care related to their remote locations? How many pensioners and elders deal with physical obstructions and/or difficulties related to technology that limit their access to necessary oral and overall health care?

ETHICALLY SPEAKING

The *Dental Hygienists' Code of Ethics* articulates the ethical principles and responsibilities by which dental hygienists are guided and under which they are accountable.⁴ The ethical principle of professional *integrity* includes the promotion of fairness, with consideration for those clients who are more vulnerable,⁴ including the medically compromised, those in remote communities, and seniors. Dental hygienists collaborate with colleagues in a cooperative, constructive, and respectful manner to provide high-quality interventions that are safe, competent, and fair to individuals, families, and communities.^{4 p7} Professional integrity also includes the promotion of social justice. According to Global Affairs Canada, social justice is about ensuring that everyone—from the poorest, most marginalized in society to the wealthiest—is afforded equal rights and opportunities.⁵



▲ *Dental Hygienists' Code of Ethics*

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*The Strength of Our Professional Advocacy...cont'd***PROFESSIONALLY SPEAKING**

Social justice is supported on many levels by the new Canada Dental Benefit and is part of CDHA's integrated advocacy strategy.¹ The efforts by CDHA to advocate for vulnerable populations, provide expert opinions, and participate in the creation of the Canada Dental Benefit are examples of our profession serving society by collaborating with other oral health professionals, non-profit groups, and representatives from government sectors.

Our profession is also addressing the importance of serving vulnerable populations with additions to the 2021 *Entry-to-Practice Canadian Competencies for Dental Hygienists*. These competencies present a detailed description of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, behaviours, and judgement required of graduating dental hygienists upon entry to practice.⁶ It is important to understand that entry-to-practice standards clarify to practitioners, educators, and regulators exactly what is expected of all dental hygienists in Canada.⁶ In the near future, new graduates will enter the profession with the following social justice proficiencies:

- A.2 Demonstrate a commitment to serving society
- D.2 Collaborate with oral health professionals and others, including those within the client's circle of care, representatives from private, voluntary, and non-profit groups, and government sectors
- F.3 Engage in advocacy to address oral health inequities and facilitate change⁶

**PRACTICALLY SPEAKING,
WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP?**

You be the judge. The strength of our professional advocacy serves the vulnerable members of our communities. CDHA advocates to address oral health inequities, facilitate change, and educate members so that they, in turn, can help the public. This issue of *Oh Canada!* contains information that will allow you to reflect on your talents, your interests, and abilities. Perhaps you will be inspired to take action and advocate for vulnerable populations, groups or members of your community and facilitate change. Thank you CDHA for education we can put into action.



▲ 2021 *Entry-to-Practice Canadian Competencies for Dental Hygienists*

References

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