

GDC Standards: Meeting and Maintaining Them

Pathway to Safe Practice for Foundation Dentists

GDC Development Outcomes A, B, D

Objective

- ▶ Provide insight into reasonable expectations of a ‘safe practitioner’ and the pathway required for a foundation dentist to satisfactorily complete foundation training.
- ▶ Learning Outcomes: the learner will
 - ▶ Describe the key principles of the GDC Standards for the Dental Team and their relevance to patient safety and professional practice.
 - ▶ Explain what constitutes a ‘safe practitioner’ in the context of Foundation Training, including competence, reflection, and ethical behaviour.
 - ▶ Identify the pathway and stages for a Foundation Dentist to achieve safe, independent practice under supervision.
 - ▶ Demonstrate strategies for maintaining GDC standards, including reflective practice, feedback, record-keeping, and professional communication.
 - ▶ Recognise common challenges faced by Foundation Dentists and outline practical approaches to overcome these while maintaining patient trust and quality care.

Introduction

- ▶ The General Dental Council (GDC) sets Standards for the Dental Team outlining behaviours, values, and principles expected of all dental professionals.
- ▶ Meeting these standards ensures patient safety, professional integrity, and successful Foundation Training.

Overview of GDC Standards

Nine core principles:

1. Put patients' interests first
2. Communicate effectively with patients
3. Obtain valid consent
4. Maintain and protect patients' information
5. Have a clear and effective complaints procedure
6. Work with colleagues in patients' best interests
7. Maintain professional knowledge and competence
8. Raise concerns if patients are at risk
9. Ensure behaviour maintains patients' confidence in you and the profession

Overview of GDC Standards

Principle

Meaning / Application for FDs

1. Put patients' interests first

Always act in the patient's best interests; prioritise safety, dignity, and comfort.

2. Communicate effectively with patients

Use clear, honest, and empathetic communication; obtain valid consent.

3. Obtain valid consent

Ensure patients understand their treatment options, risks, and costs before proceeding.

4. Maintain and protect patients' information

Comply with confidentiality, GDPR, and record-keeping requirements.

5. Have a clear and effective complaints procedure

Respond professionally to concerns or complaints, using them as learning opportunities.

6. Work with colleagues in a way that is in patients' best interests

Collaborate respectfully with the dental team; value each role.

7. Maintain your professional knowledge and competence

Engage in CPD, supervision, and reflection throughout Foundation Training.

8. Raise concerns if patients are at risk

Speak up about safety issues, poor practice, or inadequate supervision.

9. Make sure your behaviour maintains patients' confidence in you and the profession

Maintain professionalism inside and outside the workplace (including social media).

What is a Safe Practitioner?

- ▶ A safe practitioner:
 - ▶ Prioritises patient safety
 - ▶ Works within competence
 - ▶ Recognises limitations and seeks help
 - ▶ Reflects on performance and learns from feedback
 - ▶ Upholds GDC ethical and professional standards

Pathway to Safe and Independent Practice



| Stage | Focus | Supervision Level |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Early Foundation Training | Learning clinical protocols, understanding standards | Direct supervision (trainer present) |
| Mid-Year | Building confidence, managing more complex cases | Indirect supervision, reflection and feedback |
| End of Training | Independent, safe clinical decision-making | Minimal supervision, review of portfolio and evidence |

Maintaining GDC Standards

- ▶ **Reflect** regularly on patient interactions
- ▶ **Seek feedback** proactively from supervisors and colleagues.
- ▶ **Keep accurate records** of CPD, clinical cases, and reflections.
- ▶ **Demonstrate professionalism** in all aspects – punctuality, dress code, teamwork.
- ▶ **Address mistakes** openly – show learning and improvement, not avoidance.

Common Challenges for Foundation Dentists

- ▶ Managing time pressure while maintaining quality and communication.
- ▶ Handling patient complaints or misunderstandings.
- ▶ Balancing learning with service delivery expectations.
- ▶ Recognising limits and asking for help appropriately.

Foundation Training is not about perfection, but about safe progression – developing sound judgement, reflection, and professionalism.

Summary

- ▶ The GDC Standards form the ethical and professional backbone of dental practice.
- ▶ A safe practitioner combines competence, reflection, communication, and integrity.
- ▶ Foundation Dentists should use supervision, feedback, and reflection to demonstrate ongoing improvement.
- ▶ Meeting these standards ensures both patient trust and successful completion of training.
- ▶ **These standards are applicable to the whole dental team; deviance from these standards may result in referral to FtP process and risk registration**

References

- ▶ 1. GDC (2013). Standards for the Dental Team.
- ▶ 2. GDC (2016). Guidance on Using the Standards for the Dental Team.
- ▶ 3. COPDEND (2016). The Dental Blue Guide.
- ▶ 4. NHS England. A Safe Practitioner: Foundation Training Curriculum and Assessment Framework.