

Methods of communication

Importance of clinical records

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Aims & Objectives

Aim: This session highlights methods of effective communication within the clinical environment and the importance of clinical records.

Objectives: The Learner will….

- Explain the importance of effective communication within general dental practice
- Identify strategies that the foundation dentist can use to enhance communication between colleagues and to patients
- Identify what constitutes the clinical record
- Outline good practice in the maintenance of clinical records

GDC 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.

GDC Standards

Principle Two

- Communicate effectively with patients

Principle Six

- Work with colleagues in a way that serves the interests of patients

  "***You must communicate clearly and effectively with other team members and colleagues in the interests of patients***"

Why are communication skills vital in the dental practice?

PATIENTS

Improved understanding:	Clear explanations of procedures, risks, and costs help patients make informed decisions and feel more comfortable with treatment.
Increased compliance:	When patients understand their treatment plan and its benefits, they are more likely to follow instructions and attend appointments.
Enhanced patient satisfaction:	Effective communication builds rapport and trust, leading to a more positive patient experience.
Reduced anxiety:	Open communication can alleviate patient anxieties about dental procedures and the overall experience.

Why are communication skills vital in the dental practice?

PRACTICE

Fewer complaints: When patients feel heard and understood, the likelihood of complaints arising from misunderstandings or lack of information decreases.

More efficient practice: Clear communication streamlines processes, reduces errors, and allows for smoother collaboration among the dental team.

Stronger team dynamics: Effective communication among staff members ensures a more positive and efficient working environment.

Enhanced reputation: Positive patient experiences and fewer complaints contribute to a positive reputation for the practice.

Patient Communication Skills

Build Rapport & Trust

Active listening

- Demonstrate genuine interest in the patient's concerns and actively listen to their perspective

Non-verbal communication

- Facial expression – calm, smiling,
- Eye contact – maintain steady eye contact
- Tone of voice – soft, calm voice. Avoid being monotonous - disinterested
- Pace & timing – don’t rush, calm and measured
- Gestures – nods, subtle hand gestures
- Touch (be aware of cultural differences) – sometimes reassuring but be respectful of personal boundaries
- Body language – uncrossed arms, lean slightly forward

Patient Communication Skills

Clear & Concise explanation

Use Plain Language:

- Avoid jargon and technical terms. Explain procedures in a way that is easy for the patient to understand.

Visual Aids:

- Utilize models, diagrams, or videos to illustrate treatment options and procedures.

Written Materials:

- Provide written information about treatment plans, post-operative instructions, and other relevant details.

Check for Understanding:

- Regularly ask the patient if they have any questions and ensure they understand the information being provided.

Patient Communication Skills

Informed Consent

Explain Risks and Benefits:

- Clearly outline the potential risks and benefits of each treatment option, allowing the patient to make an informed decision.

Patient Involvement:

- Encourage patients to participate in the decision-making process and address any concerns they may have.

Document Consent:

- Ensure that the patient's consent is properly documented

Patient Communication Skills

Managing Expectations

Realistic Expectations:

- Be honest about the potential outcomes of treatment and manage patient expectations accordingly.

Long-Term Goals:

- Discuss the long-term implications of treatment and how it will impact the patient's oral health over time

Patient Communication Skills

Handling Complaints

Open Communication:

- Access to complaints policy

Prompt Resolution:

- Address complaints promptly and professionally, striving for a fair and satisfactory resolution


START
DOING
THIS NOW!

Communication with colleagues

Clear Communication in the Dental Team

Patients often receive care from multiple dental professionals.

Good communication is essential for safe, effective patient care.

Respect and recognise each team member’s role.

Key points for clear communication:

- Be clear on goals and methods before delegating.
- Provide full information; check understanding.
- Use specific terms.
- Referral letters: include patient history, findings, diagnosis, treatment plan, and desired outcome.
- Record team members involved in decisions.
- Confirm complex orders with laboratories.

Communication with colleagues

Professional Conduct & Conflict Management

GDC: Treat colleagues **fairly and with respect** in all communications.

- Be approachable and open to encourage collaboration.
- Reflect on communication failures; improve via training & shared learning.
- Manage conflict effectively:
  - Avoid personal or derogatory comments (incl. on social media).
  - Maintain an anti-bullying policy to protect team respect.

Practical Tips For FD Dental Nurse

- **Communicate openly from the start** – agree how you will work together and how you prefer to raise concerns.
- **Speak up early** – if you notice something has been missed or are unsure about an instruction, say so promptly.
- **Use supportive language** – try *“Can I just check…?”*, *“Would you like me to…?”* or *“Can I clarify…?”*
- **Avoid assumptions** – the FD may be unfamiliar with local practice systems, materials or routines. Explain rather than assume they know.
- **Be clear and specific** – particularly when communicating important information about the patient, equipment or treatment.
- **Choose the right moment** – where possible, discuss sensitive feedback or concerns privately rather than in front of the patient.

Practical Tips

- **Share what you observe** – tell the FD if a patient appears anxious, confused, uncomfortable or has not understood something.
- **Use closed-loop communication** – confirm important requests and information: *“Yes, I’ve done that.”*
- **Give constructive feedback** – *“That worked well. Next time, could we try…?”*
- **Debrief after challenging appointments** – a quick, informal conversation can prevent the same difficulties recurring.
- **Don’t be afraid to challenge respectfully** – patient safety takes priority, regardless of seniority.

Reflection

- Do you feel confident in recognising good communication skills in the workplace?
- Do you think you could identify where a foundation dentist needs support or development of their communication skills?
- How could you support your foundation dentist in ensuring good outcomes for the patient?
- How can you raise concerns about gaps in communication in the workplace?

Importance of Clinical records



Essential for patient care & continuity



Provide evidence if standard of care is questioned



Must be accurate, reliable & accessible

GDC Standards

Principle Four

- Maintain and protect patients' information

"It is vital that you keep ***complete and accurate*** patient records. With many of our fitness to practise cases our committees are often faced with two very different recollections of the same event and the ***records are often the only evidence*** that can be produced in defence of allegations made against registrants. ***Record as much information as possible***, include the name of the registrant providing the treatment and if you have to make amendments to records, make sure that those changes are clearly marked and dated"



What constitutes the clinical record?

What do you think?

What constitutes the clinical record

- **Patient Information:** Full name, date of birth, address, and contact details.
- **Medical History: Dental History:** Previous dental treatments, surgeries, and ongoing issues.
- **Clinical Examination Findings:** Comprehensive assessment of the patient's oral health, including intraoral and extraoral findings, radiographs, and other diagnostic results.
- **Treatment Plans:** Detailed plans outlining proposed treatments, alternatives, potential risks, and benefits.
- **Appointment Notes:** Records of each appointment, including procedures performed, materials used, LA, and any complications or changes in the patient's condition.
- **Consent Forms:** Signed consent forms for treatments, including explanations of procedures and potential risks.
- **Radiographs and Images:** X-rays and other diagnostic images, properly labelled and stored
- **Digital intraoral scans, study models**
- **Laboratory prescriptions**
- **Referrals**

Clinical Records

“CCCC”

The Four Cs of Good Records

Contemporaneous – record at time of care, signed & dated

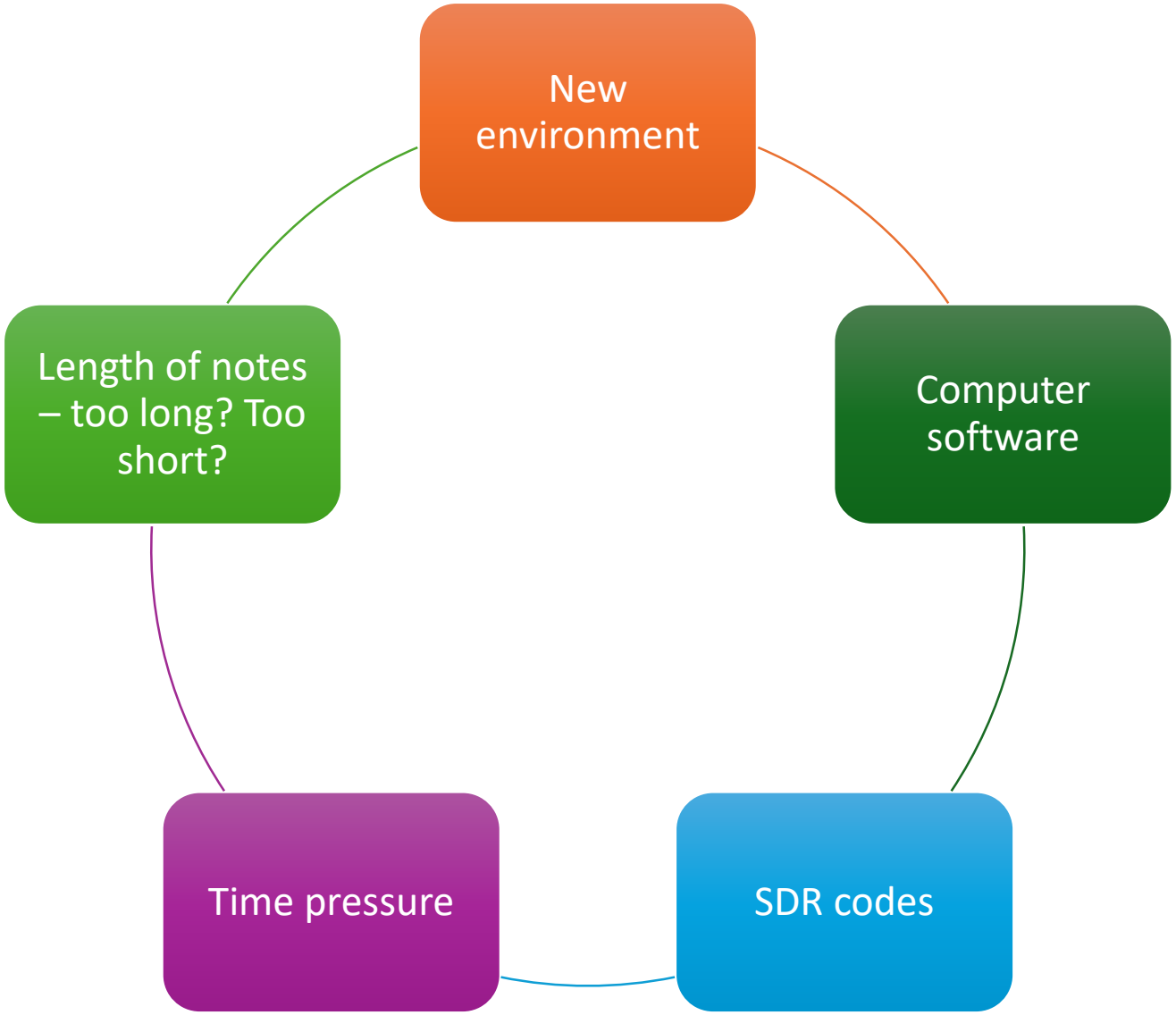
Clear – understandable by others, including patients

Concise – only essential info, no unnecessary detail

Complete – capture all aspects: history, complaints, exam, tests, diagnosis, treatment, consent, outcomes, payments

Why do you think Foundation Dentists may find Clinical Record Keeping difficult?

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Clinical Records

Best Practices for Record Keeping

- Be factual & consistent
- Avoid or standardise abbreviations
- Use one charting system consistently
- Ensure legibility (handwritten or digital)
- Correct errors appropriately (single line strike-through, dated & signed)
- Check notes written by others before filing

Clinical Records

Digital Record Requirements

- Must produce hard copies & audit trails
- Clearly identify author of entries
- Record date of creation & modification
- Ensure data security:
  - Strong passwords & encryption
  - No storage on personal devices
  - Regular, secure backups (including off-site)
  - Secure disposal of old hardware
- Follow workplace data security policies

Clinical Records

Other Records & References

- Keep separate from clinical record:
  - Complaints, disclosure requests, insurance reports
  - Legal/indemnity correspondence
- Follow practice/Trust procedures for data handling
- Guidance: FGDP Clinical Examination & Record-Keeping standards

Reflection

- Review how the Foundation Dentist manages their patient records
- Are they new to the computer system?
- Can you help them navigate the new system and give advice on what other dentists do in the practice in terms of record keeping?
- Are clinical photographs taken and stored appropriately? Ie not on personal mobile phones?

Further Reading

- “Dental record keeping: what is professional, reasonable and in the interest of patients?” GDC

https://www.gdc-uk.org/news-blogs/blog/detail/blogs/2024/06/19/dental-record-keeping-what-is-professional-reasonable-and-in-the-interest-of-patients

- “An Introduction to good record keeping” DDU
  - https://www.theddu.com/guidance-and-advice/guides/keeping-good-records

Further Reading

- GDC Standards
  - https://standards.gdc-uk.org/pages/principle2/principle2
- “How to communicate effectively in your dental practice?” Dentistry.co.uk
  - https://dentistry.co.uk/2025/01/09/how-to-communicate-effectively-in-your-dental-practice/