



Alberta College of Dental Hygienists

# **Guidelines for Dental Hygienists in Alberta**

## **Advertising**

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The Alberta College of Dental Hygienists (the College) provides guidelines to support dental hygienists in understanding and meeting their legislated requirements, standards of practice, and code of ethics. Guidelines establish professionally accepted means by which dental hygienists can achieve compliance with the College's standards.

Failing to comply with a guideline may be considered unprofessional conduct if the dental hygienist did not achieve compliance with the standard, or if the departure from the guideline compromises the quality of client care or the integrity and/or credibility of the dental hygiene profession.

A dental hygienist may only depart from a guideline if they can demonstrate their chosen conduct:

- Achieves compliance with the applicable standard;
- Maintains the safety, effectiveness, or appropriateness of client care required by the standard; and
- Upholds the integrity of the dental hygiene profession.

While these guidelines reflect the requirements for dental hygienists at the time of development, these requirements may change from time to time. Dental hygienists remain responsible for ensuring their practice meets current legislative requirements, Standards of Practice, and Code of Ethics.



## Dental Hygienists' Responsibilities

### Advertising Standard of Practice

- The dental hygienist ensures advertising is clear, truthful, accurate, and verifiable and does not mislead or misinform the public.

### Code of Ethics: Veracity and Integrity

- Veracity is the ethical principal of honesty. Integrity contributes to professional credibility through consistency of actions, values, methods, expectations, and outcomes. Together, veracity and integrity guide the dental hygienist to be consistently honest, truthful, and to make decisions that are professionally appropriate.

### Conflicts of Interest Standard of Practice

- The dental hygienist identifies and manages potential, perceived or real conflicts of interest to protect the patient's best interests and the dental hygienist's professional integrity.

### Health Professions Act, Section 102

- A regulated member [of a health professional college] shall not engage in advertising that is untruthful, inaccurate or otherwise capable of misleading or misinforming the public.

## Advertising

Advertising is any communication made orally, in print, or electronically with the intent to influence the public's choice, opinion, or behaviour and promote either yourself as a professional or your professional services. Dental hygienists are responsible for ensuring any advertising activities they conduct for themselves or that a third party does on their behalf comply with the *Health Professions Act*, the Standards of Practice and the Code of Ethics.

There is a difference between promotional advertising and educating the public. In both cases you would apply the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

- If you are only educating the public about dental hygiene topics, the Advertising Standard of Practice would not apply.
- If you promote yourself as a dental hygienist or the services you provide while you are educating the public, the Advertising Standard of Practice applies.

## Advertising by Third Parties

Advertising made by third parties on a dental hygienist's behalf must meet the College's Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. This includes advertising about you made by:

- An employer;
- A facility where you provide dental hygiene services; or



- A hired service provider (e.g., marketing service).

*Review any advertising made for or about you to ensure that it complies with the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics and is consistent with these guidelines.*

## Integrity of the Profession

As regulated health professionals, dental hygienists benefit from the privilege of self-regulation and holding the public's trust. Any advertising that may be perceived as unprofessional or negatively affecting the public's trust in dental hygienists may harm the profession's integrity and should be avoided.

Avoid advertising that:

- Takes advantage of patient insecurities (e.g., implying they will have halitosis if they do not receive dental hygiene services); or
- Makes disparaging remarks about other health professionals or professions.
- Makes claims based solely on anecdotes, personal experiences or the manufacturer's promotional materials.
  - Refer to reliable sources in your advertising. Reliable sources will include research findings that are methodologically appropriate and clinically relevant to the product or service. These should be considered based on the quality of the evidence (e.g., scholarly peer-reviewed journals, systematic reviews, clinical and best practice guidelines).

## Misleading Advertising

Dental hygienists must not mislead the public when advertising. Your advertising should accurately represent your practice of dental hygiene and reflect that a patient's dental hygiene needs and outcomes will vary for each individual patient.

Avoid using any misleading advertising techniques that:

- Create an unreasonable patient expectation.
  - A patient may perceive they will achieve a benefit you advertise that may not be reasonable for that particular patient.
- Create unnecessary demand for a dental hygiene service.
  - Encouraging the public to seek out a service or product within a specified time frame (e.g., coupons, time-limited offers, or untargeted advertising to maximize insurance benefits) without considering the patient's individual needs may persuade patients to delay necessary care or access unnecessary care.
- Use inaccurate, untruthful, or biased illustrations, images and other media (e.g., before-and-after photos).
  - These can create unreasonable patient expectations unless there is a clearly visible disclaimer.



- For example, if you are using before-and-after photos, your disclaimer should indicate:
  - Whether the photo is of your patient;
  - Whether the photo represents dental hygiene services you have provided;
  - That the photograph is for informational purposes only as individual treatment results may vary from patient-to-patient; and
  - That not all patients are candidates for that dental hygiene service.
- Include any product or service outside the practice of dental hygiene that misrepresents the practice of a dental hygienist.
  - This suggests the product or service is subject to professional standards when it is unrelated to the practice of dental hygiene (e.g., selling cosmetics, providing dermatological services).
- Use subjective terms that can be interpreted in different ways by different people, are opinions, or cannot be verified (e.g., saying “relaxing” or “comfortable”).

## Testimonials

Advertising must not include testimonials from patients. Testimonials can compromise patient privacy, are based on opinions rather than facts, and may not reflect most patients’ experiences with a dental hygienist. Endorsements about you or your services imply superiority and may be seen as misleading advertising.

The feedback left on independent review sites (e.g., Google Reviews, Yelp) that publish all feedback (positive and negative) and restrict your ability to select what is shared with the public may not be considered a testimonial depending on the circumstances.

- However:
  - It may be misleading to the public if you have the option to either remove unfavourable reviews or emphasize favourable reviews.
  - You should not elicit or incentivize patients to leave positive reviews on independent review sites. Linking to an independent review site that contains elicited positive patient reviews is misleading to the public.

## Endorsements

An endorsement of a product or service by a dental hygienist implies that the dental hygienist has used their professional knowledge to assess the product or service. You should only endorse products or services if an evidence-informed assessment can justify the endorsement and the advertising does not create unreasonable expectations for a patient.

- Ensure you disclose any benefit(s) you receive for an endorsement in your advertising.



- Avoid making endorsements based solely on anecdotes, personal experiences or the manufacturer's promotional materials.
  - Refer to reliable sources before making an endorsement.

## Inducements and Incentives

Dental hygienists are prohibited from participating in advertising that uses inducements or incentives to influence a patient's decision. These activities can undermine the integrity of the profession and/or create unnecessary demand for dental hygiene services.

Avoid advertising that promotes:

- Time-limited prices;
- Discount coupons; or
- Gift certificates or prizes for receiving a service.
  - Promotional activities (including prizes) may comply with the Standard of Practice if they do not influence a patient's decision about dental hygiene services and are available to anyone regardless of whether they are a patient or not.

## Advertising Fees and Services

Fees that are included in a dental hygienist's advertising should be:

- Precise to the services offered for each fee quoted;
- Descriptive of whether additional amounts will be charged in addition to the fee (e.g., taxes, disbursements).

Fees and services should be described clearly and accurately to enable the public to understand what will be provided and the cost to the patient. Avoid describing the service in a way that could mislead the public (e.g., "teeth cleaning" does not accurately describe what service is being provided).

The terms "complimentary," "included," or at "no charge" may be used in advertising.

- "Free" may also be used but can potentially devalue the professional service you provide.
- If services are advertised as being without cost, the offer should:
  - Follow the [Guidelines for Fees and Billing](#), and
  - Avoid techniques that create unnecessary demand (e.g., time-limited offers).

## Comparative Advertising

Comparative advertising measures the dental hygienist's fees, techniques, materials, or equipment against other health professionals or clinics. It is misleading if the details of the comparison are either incorrect or cannot be verified or proven.



Avoid comparative advertising that:

- Implies that superior material and/or equipment are used or that services and techniques are superior to other professionals.
- Refers to fees of other clinics or service providers.
  - The fees can change without notice and result in misleading advertising with incorrect information.
- Implies you are superior to other professionals.

## Representing Titles

If you are registered on the General or Courtesy Register, you may use the protected titles “dental hygienist”, “registered dental hygienist”, “DH”, and “RDH” in advertising. Using your protected title informs the public you have met the requirements to become registered and are a health professional.

To comply with legislation, dental hygienists cannot:

- Imply they are a “specialist” or hold themselves out to be a specialist or superior in connection with providing any dental hygiene service.
- Use or advertise the title “Doctor” or the abbreviation “Dr.” in connection with providing health services unless they hold a doctorate degree in dental hygiene from a program approved by Council.

## Representing Training and Experience

In their advertising, dental hygienists may refer to:

- Active College authorizations to perform Advanced Restricted Activities:
  - Administering local anaesthesia;
  - Prescribing and administering nitrous oxide/oxygen conscious sedation;
  - Performing restorative procedures of a permanent nature;
  - Performing orthodontic procedures; and/or
  - Prescribing Schedule 1 drugs.
- Their dental hygiene program of study; and/or
- Other university or college degrees they hold if not misleading;
  - For example, advertising an international dentistry degree may lead patients to believe they are receiving services from a dentist rather than a dental hygienist. This would be in conflict with the College’s Standards of Practice.

Advertising should not refer to courses, continuing competence programs, dental hygiene awards, or designations which could mislead the public to believe that one dental hygienist is superior to another dental hygienist.



# Guidelines for Advertising

While you may refer to the accurate number of years you have practiced, it would be misleading to refer to the combined years of practice of all the professionals in your office.

- For example, this number can be misleading if one person has practiced for 2 years and another for 20 years of experience. A combined 22 years of experience does not accurately describe either individual's experience.

## Business Names

Business names used by dental hygienists are considered part of advertising and must follow the College's Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. You should avoid business names that have the potential to mislead or deceive. This includes names that:

- May confuse potential patients about what services are provided at the dental hygiene practice (e.g., "spa", "salon"); or
- Use subjective terms or comparative language (e.g., "gentle", "superior").

## Use of Alberta College of Dental Hygienists' Logo

The College does not permit use of its logo or branding for advertising by dental hygienists. You can indicate your registration with the College without use of the logo by using your protected titles ("dental hygienist," "registered dental hygienist," "DH," "RDH").

## Retention of Advertising

Dental hygienists should maintain a record of any advertising they make or that is made on their behalf for at least two years following release.

## Acknowledgements and Additional Information

ACDH acknowledges the Alberta College of Pharmacy, College of Dental Surgeons of Alberta, College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta, College of Physiotherapists of Alberta, and Health Quality Council of Alberta as references for content in this guideline's development.

Additional information about advertising may be found:

- [Canadian Code of Advertising Standards](#)
- [Health Professions Act](#) sections 1(1)(pp)(xii), 128(7)