



## **Guest Editorial - Why Ethics?**

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In our last reporting cycle the Board of Dentistry made it a requirement for dental professionals to have an ethics class. "What the heck?" was my first reaction— "I don't need a class in ethics". Then, I thought about this:

I believe the most important moment for the coach of any team is the first practice. Day one is more than just getting folks back into shape; it is the first time a coach has an opportunity to set the tone for everything that will follow for the rest of the season: expectations about attitude, performance, and perspective. You have all heard you never get a second chance to make a first impression. I once met John Wooden when my brother attended his camp. There was an immediate aura about his presence— perhaps it was the 10 basketball NCAA national championships or perhaps it was more. He lived his life and demonstrated it to his players in the form of a Pyramid of Success based on an eight-principle creed his father gave him as a child.

Every year he spent his first practice teaching his players the right way to put on their socks. That's right, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, Bill Walton, and all the other UCLA All-Americans and players each sat through four lectures on how to put on their socks. Coach Wooden's philosophy was that if players put their socks on the right way they would avoid getting blisters, but even more important, he wanted to send the message: take care of all the little details, like socks, and the big details, like championships, would take care of themselves.

What the owner, manager, coach or dentist does sets the tone expected for everything that follows.

A simple explanation of medical/dental ethics can be divided into five categories with related questions that you can ask yourself:

1. Patient Autonomy ("self determination") - Did the patient have an opportunity to participate in the decision of treatment? Were they informed of the reasonable outcome of the treatment and what would happen if they chose not to seek treatment?
2. Nonmaleficence ("do no harm") - Was the treatment provided consistent with the accepted Standard of Care? Do you have the training to provide the treatment? Does the person to whom you delegate have the necessary training? Should the case be referred?
3. Beneficence ("do good") - Did you act in the best interest of the patient and is the patient or community better served by the treatment rendered? Did you act with good moral character in providing the care?
4. Justice ("fairness") - Is the patient being discriminated against for any reason? Have you abandoned them in any way?
5. Non-Patient Professional Relationships - Is there a conflict of interest between the treatment performed or the materials use and a company or person?

The point is really whether or not you will set the tone for your practice and those around you. Will you do your very best to take care of those who entrust their care to you, and do it in a way where you would be willing to let someone else look at your work? My hope is that everyone learns to put on their socks the right way.