



Periodontal Patients' Bill of Rights and Responsibilities

Introduction

Periodontal diseases can adversely affect the structures that support the teeth and may increase some patients' risk for a variety of systemic problems. They also can have a negative impact on a patient's overall health, appearance, comfort, and nutrition. Effective periodontal therapy often requires cooperation between patients, periodontists, general dentists, hygienists, and other dental specialists.

To provide good patient care, it is important to maintain open and honest communications between patients and health care professionals. With these issues in mind, the American Academy of Periodontology presents a Periodontal Patients' Bill of Rights and Responsibilities with the expectation that it will contribute to more effective periodontal care and advance the health and wellness of the American people.

1. Right to Respectful and Non-Discriminatory Care

- Patients have a right to considerate and respectful care.
- Patients have a right to be treated without discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, etc. However, they do not have the right to treatment from a particular dentist if the dentist reasonably concludes that the patient is disruptive or does not comply with reasonable requests. Moreover, dental practitioners will exercise reasonable judgment in determining whether to treat patients in an office or a hospital setting.

2. Right to Appropriate Diagnosis and Treatment

- Patients have a right to appropriate diagnosis and treatment. At a minimum, a periodontal assessment should consist of an inspection for the following: visual signs of inflammation (redness), tissue contour, bleeding upon probing, tooth mobility, and screening to determine the presence of inflamed pockets (deep spaces under the gums that reflect loss of support for the adjacent teeth). The need to take adjunctive radiographs (x-rays) will be dictated by clinical findings and judgment of the examining dental practitioner. Provision of an appropriate course of periodontal therapy is of primary importance.

3. Right to Informed Consent

- Patients have a right to obtain from their dental practitioner current and understandable information concerning the diagnosis, treatment and prognosis of their periodontal condition. This information includes a short description of the recommended treatment, accompanying potential risks, anticipated benefits, probabilities of success, and alternate therapies. Patients also have a right to be informed of financial implications of treatment choices.
- Patients have a right to make decisions concerning the plan of care prior to treatment and to refuse recommended therapy.
- Patients have a right to consent or decline to participate in proposed research studies and to have these studies fully explained prior to making any decisions regarding their participation.

4. Right to Referral

- Patients have a right to expect referral to a periodontist for evaluation and treatment if the dental practitioner is unwilling or unable to provide the necessary periodontal treatment. If patients are treated for periodontal disease by a general dentist, and problems persist, the general dentist should consider referral to a periodontist.

5. Right to Access Records

- Patients have a right to review the records pertaining to their therapy and to have all information explained or interpreted as necessary.
- Patients have a right to direct that the records of their therapy, or copies of their records be transferred to another clinician for consultation. The dentist, however, may charge the patient for making copies.

6. Right to Confidentiality

- Patients have a right to privacy. Consultation, examination and treatment should be conducted in a manner which protects each patient's privacy. Communications pertaining to patient records should be treated as confidential and should be provided to other health care providers or insurers only as needed to serve the patient's well being or as directed by the patient.

7. Right to Continuity of Care

- Patients have a right to expect that their dental practitioner will discuss and offer continuity of care (maintenance) after active periodontal therapy is completed. Maintenance (supportive periodontal therapy) may be provided by the general dentist/hygienist team and/or by the periodontist/hygienist team as deemed in the best interest of the patient.

8. Right to Resolution of Grievances

- Patients have a right to honest answers if they inquire about their past treatment. Patients with complaints also have the right to be informed of available resources to resolve grievances.

9. Right to Advocacy by the Dental Practitioner

- Patients have a right to expect that their dental practitioner will take reasonable steps to advocate for them when third party payers refuse to pay for a procedure that the practitioner believes is necessary to treat the patient's periodontal condition.

10. Responsibilities of Patients

- Patients have a responsibility to participate in maintaining their oral health. To facilitate attaining optimal periodontal health, the patient should maintain a high level of personal oral hygiene, undertake necessary treatment, minimize identified risk factors (e.g., smoking) which may contribute to their periodontal condition, and obtain periodic evaluations and supportive therapy (maintenance) after active treatment.

Conclusion

The rights and responsibilities enumerated above are based on both law and ethics. The American Academy of Periodontology hopes that listing them in a single document will make it easier for patients to understand and exercise them. Finally, the Academy notes that the dentist/patient relationship is based upon trust. Conduct that honors and reinforces this trust-based relationship deserves to be designated as patients' rights.