Peer Review and Quality Assurance

What is It and Why is It an Important Member Benefit?

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Upholding Excellence: Why NYSDA Members Must Engage in Peer Review

By participating in the New York State Dental Association's Peer Review and Quality Assurance Program, member dentists affirm their commitment to the highest standards of patient care and professional integrity. This essential program not only protects patients, it also strengthens the dental profession by providing a fair, confidential and effective mechanism for resolving disputes.

Peer Review: A Professional Obligation and Privilege

Participation in peer review is a requirement of NYSDA membership, reflecting the Association's dedication to quality assurance and public trust. The process is a form of binding arbitration that evaluates the appropriateness and quality of dental care provided by NYSDA members. It is conducted by impartial committees of professional peers who volunteer their time and expertise to uphold the standards of the profession.

A Confidential and Credible Process

One of the most compelling aspects of peer review is its confidentiality. Neither the proceedings nor the outcomes are reported to outside agencies or the public. This ensures that disputes are resolved discreetly and professionally, without reputational harm to the dentist or undue stress for the patient. Moreover, peer review decisions are final and have been upheld in court, offering immunity from subsequent litigation.

Protecting Patients, Supporting Dentists

Peer review offers patients a trusted alternative to legal action, while providing dentists with a structured, impartial forum to address concerns. When treatment is found to be inconsistent with the standard of care, the committee may direct a refund of fees. Conversely, when care is deemed appropriate, the dentist is vindicated, and outstanding fees are remitted. The process also allows for educational interventions, such as continuing education requirements, to support professional growth.

A Model of Professional Self-Regulation

The peer review system exemplifies the dental profession's ability to self-regulate with fairness, transparency and accountability. It fosters public confidence and reinforces the ethical foundation of dental practice. By participating in peer review, NYSDA members not only fulfill a professional obligation, they contribute to a culture of excellence that benefits patients, practitioners and the profession as a whole.

Ethical Conduct in Peer Review: Respecting Colleagues and Patients

In accordance with the New York State Dental Association's Code of Ethics, member dentists are expected to approach peer review with professionalism, discretion and respect for all parties involved. This includes refraining from disparaging colleagues, whether in formal proceedings or informal discussions. Constructive, unbiased evaluation is essential to maintaining the integrity of the peer review process and upholding the dignity of the profession.

Dentists must also communicate with patients about peer review in a tactful and informative manner, avoiding language that could undermine trust in the dental community. The goal is to resolve concerns while preserving the patient's confidence in the profession and ensuring that ethical standards are upheld throughout the process.

By adhering to these principles, NYSDA members reinforce the values of collegiality, fairness and ethical responsibility—cornerstones of both the peer review system and the broader dental profession.

Dr. Lehman is chair of the NYSDA Council on Peer Review and Quality Assurance. Queries about this article and/or the Peer Review Council and process can be sent to Patty Marcucia at pmarcucia@nysdental.org.