

# The Importance of Ethics to the Dental Profession

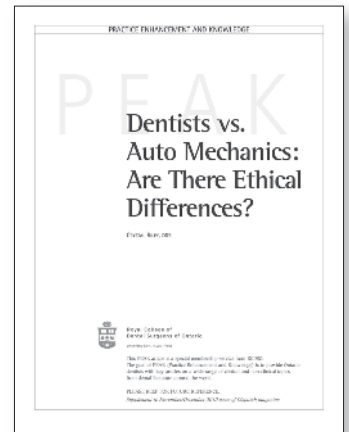
PEAK (Practice Enhancement and Knowledge) is a College service for members. The goal is to regularly provide Ontario dentists with copies of key articles on a wide range of clinical and non-clinical topics from the dental literature around the world.

It is important to note that PEAK articles may contain opinions, views or statements that are not necessarily endorsed by the College. However, PEAK is committed to providing quality material to enhance the knowledge and skills of member dentists.

The dental profession holds a special place of trust within society. As a result, society extends opportunities and privileges to the profession that are not available to the public at large. In return, the profession makes a commitment that its members will adhere to high standards of clinical expertise and ethical conduct.

The ethical behaviour of dentists is one of the most important factors in the promotion of quality dental care and recognition of dentists as professionals. Continued public trust in the dental profession and in the principle of profession-led self-regulation is dependent on the commitment of individual dentists to high standards of ethical conduct.

Ethical behaviour is the foundation of the public's continuing trust in the effectiveness of self-regulation.



To provide our members with a unique perspective on this issue, PEAK is pleased to offer the following article along with the current issue of Dispatch: “Dentists Versus Auto Mechanics – Are There Ethical Differences”, from the Summer 2013 issue of the Journal of the American College of Dentists. The article was written by Dr. Crystal Riley in 2008, while she was an undergraduate dental student at the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry, Western University.

The article compares and contrasts the ethical perspectives of dentists with another occupational group, auto mechanics, in relation to several issues, including:

- the primary concern of both groups
- billing procedures
- advertising
- emergency care
- the level of autonomy provided to patients/clients
- the amount of disclosure given to patients/clients
- the ability to judge the work of others
- the freedom to pursue romantic relationships with patients/clients.

In analyzing the differences between dentists and auto mechanics, the author determines that dentists have much greater ethical obligations to the public, which are captured in a Code of Ethics and enforced by a self-regulatory body through regulations. She concludes that it is the responsibility of all dentists to consider the effects of their actions on the individual patient, society, the dental profession and, finally, themselves.

The College’s Code of Ethics sets out principles of ethical conduct, which are based on the core ethical values of integrity, fairness, beneficence, compassion and respect for patient autonomy. The College’s Code of Ethics is available from our website at [www.rcdso.org](http://www.rcdso.org).

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