

Student professionalism and fitness to practise Standards for the Dental Team Case studies

Principle 2

Principle 2 Communicate effectively with patients



Roisin

Roisin is a student dental hygienist on a work placement. She has made good progress on the course. She struggles with some of the more 'direct' patients with a different cultural background and can often be rude in response. Today a couple of them have complained.

Student dental hygienist

Roisin is in the first year of her training programme. She has found it very stressful dealing with some patients who are more direct than others when describing their issues and decisions about treatment. To Roisin these patients seem to come across as quite demanding and critical. This makes her feel defensive and she doesn't quite know how to deal with it. She sometimes appears rude when she responds. Two patients complain that Roisin has been dismissive and brusque during their treatment. Roisin is used to getting on well with most people and feels very upset. She is also worrying about how well she is doing on the course.

What do you think Roisin should do next?

Select an option:

- Wait and see if things improve?
- Try and avoid these patients?

- Speak to her supervisor and ask advice?

See what Roisin did next...

Roisin spoke to her supervisor who had made it very clear that students were welcome to approach them at any point with any problems they had. She explained how stressful it was when she felt people were rude. Roisin felt she was a student and doing her best and that she wasn't sure how to deal with it. Her supervisor was able to explain some of the cultural differences, communication styles and expectations these patients may have. They were then able to look at appropriate responses. Her supervisor offered some extra training and support during appointments with patients and they agreed to review things in a couple of months.

Roisin felt reassured and supported. This helped her understand more about the variety of patients in the population. Roisin had asked for support when she felt she needed it and demonstrated professionalism. Although there had been a couple of complaints Roisin had recognised the issues, shown insight and was proactive in trying to address them. No concerns were raised about Roisin's student fitness to practise.

GDC principles

2.1 You must communicate effectively with patients – listen to them, give them time to consider information and take their individual views and communication needs into account.

2.1.1 You must treat patients as individuals. You should take their specific communication needs and preferences into account where possible and respect any cultural values and differences.

Other guidance

Ask your training provider if there is any other guidance or information they would recommend.

Discussion points

- Have you ever felt it was difficult finding the right communication approach with a patient? What did you do?
- Who else might Roisin have asked about cultural differences and how to communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds?

Disclaimer

These fictional case studies are for illustration purposes only and should not be relied on to make clinical decisions. Their aim is to put GDC guidance in context, exploring how some of the principles might work in practice.

The case studies cannot be relied on to be clinically accurate. Nor do the case studies intend to show the "correct" interpretation of GDC guidance, only one (or more) possible interpretation(s).