

# Advertising Guidelines

*A Reference Paper for Members*

April 2005



## ADVERTISING GUIDELINES

### PREAMBLE

In a survey of members, 87% responded that they wanted advertising guidelines. A working group, consisting of members from various practice styles and formats, was given the responsibility of creating a reference paper for members, to provide guidelines for advertising and promotional material. The guidelines reflect the views of the members as determined from the survey.

These guidelines can provide help to members in complying with the current legal regulations but they are not intended in any way as an interpretation of those regulations. The consensus view is that the best way to avoid a crossing of the line is to stay away from it. The guidelines suggest the kind of cautious approach as recommended by the members in the survey.

A dichotomy exists between what it is to be a healthcare professional and a business entity. Commercial goals are at one end of the spectrum and patient care and professional goals at the other. As a culture we accept advertising. The issue is what is its rightful place in the practice of our profession? In other words, what are the implications of commercially structured promotional strategies for the tradition of professional trust. The challenge then becomes to balance professional values and actions with self interest. The guidelines attempt to describe this balance.

Advertising is a matter of professional discernment. Generalized advertising serves the goals of commercialism and competition among members, which must be viewed in the professional context in which we operate. It should not be confused with internal promotion by which one makes services known to one's own patients. Internal promotion is not addressed in the guidelines.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. ***We are what we project.*** The working group understood that the public, those we attempt to reach with our marketing and advertising messages, will perceive dentists to be professionals only if they believe our messages and their methods of delivery are professional.
2. ***Dentists, promote your profession.*** The Working Group believe the responsibility of the dentist is to promote the profession and the positive outcomes available from the profession rather than individual practices.

## **GUIDELINES**

### **1. Content of Dental Advertisements**

The following represent the accepted contents for any and all forms of advertising:

- Name of Practice
- Name of dentist(s)
- Practice address / location
- Office contact information
- Street address
- Mail address
- Contact numbers (telephone, facsimile)
- Electronic contact (e-mail, website)
- Hours of operation
- Credentials required for licensure
- Payment method options
- Emergency services availability
- Acceptance of new patients
- Practice limitations
- Languages spoken
- Handicapped accessibility

### **2. Methods of advertising deemed not acceptable.**

A member is expected to refrain from carrying out or participating in the following type and methods of advertising:

- Television and radio advertising of an individual member's practice
- Billboard and billboard-like advertising
- The advertising of free services, discounted services or grouped/package services
- Participation in advertisements by manufacturers of dental products or equipment
- Participation in the advertising or promotion of a member's dental practice by a third party
- Display advertising in yellow pages or yellow page like directories

### **3. Newspaper/print media advertising**

It is expected that advertisements, including announcements, placed in newspapers and other print media contain only that information listed in Section #1 above and be limited in use to, announcing the opening of a practice, the changing of practice location, the changing of ownership and the introduction of an associate or partner. There is no frequency of insertions recommendation. Advertisements are expected to be no larger than 6" by 6". It is expected members will refrain from infomercial advertisements.

#### **4. Yellow Pages and other directories**

Members are expected to refrain from *Display Ads* listings and limit listings to *In-column Alphabetic* presentations. Listing content is to respect that identified in Section #1 above. Sample conforming listings are presented in the Appendix.

#### **5. Flyers and mail-outs**

It is expected members will limit the use of flyers and mail-outs to distribute information to patients of record only. General *mail drops* and mass flyer distribution is not acceptable. Content is to respect Section #1 above.

#### **6. Signage**

A member's sign is expected to follow the content guidelines from Section #1. The size of signs should be such as to conform to other signs in the immediate vicinity.

#### **7. Websites**

Where members develop practice specific websites, the *home* page of that site should contain only that information identified in Section #1. It is expected subsequent pages will not contain subjective information such as patient testimonials. Links should only be to sites containing relevant dentally related information. Dental health information on a member's site is expected to be current and based on well found science.

#### **8. Community sponsorship**

Members are encouraged to engage in community sponsorship programs and activities. Dentist information should adhere to content matter from Section #1. It is expected members will not offer professional services as contributions to auctions, draws, raffles and the like.

#### **9. Other matters**

Not all public advertising and marketing issues can be addressed in guidelines such as those presented above. Where a member is unsure about the appropriateness of an advertising or marketing opportunity that is not addressed in these guidelines, the member is encouraged to contact the Association for guidance.