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EDITORIAL

Ethics and law pertain to every aspect of dentistry and because of this (or in spite of it) many do not regard it as a specialist area. Silos of specialization have evolved in dentistry providing even more reason to have a group that brings dentists together to reflect on the dilemmas that are common, to examine basic ethical and legal principles with a contemporary focus, to share research and experiences. The objectives of the International Dental Ethics and Law Society (IDEALS) achieve this goal.

IDEALS evolved from the International Congress on Dental Law in 1992, with the objectives of exchanging ideas and experiences, advancing knowledge and academic education, promoting research, and encouraging the development of public policies related to dental ethics and law. Biennial congresses in different countries feature cross-cultural and international expertise – the latest congress had representatives from 26 countries.

Yvo Vermylen (Belgium) organized the first congress in 1992 and became the first president of IDEALS. He was skillfully supported by Jos Welie (USA) as the hard working secretary. Yvo was also the organizer of the 2012 IDEALS Congress in Leuven. This supplement to JFOS incorporates nine of the fifty oral presentations. A highlight of the congresses is the variety of presentations, not just in the topics covered, international reach, and the disciplines represented, but also in the style of delivery. Presentations include scientific research, academic reviews, discussion papers and case studies, with plenty of time allowed for vigorous discussion.

Basic ethical principles are always tested by contemporary dilemmas and each era must find solutions to reflect society's requirements. Similarly, legislation provides for society's changing needs in order and justice. Some of the pressing challenges of today deal with global mobility, with the commercialization of professional services and with the conflict between rights, entitlements and individual responsibility. These papers provide an insight into how dentistry is involved with, and deals with these dilemmas.

The movement of people across borders in the European Union requires EU and national laws to cover financing and reimbursement for treatment and set a standard for liability and insurance. One paper deals with this. Another paper examines the issue of national requirements for dentists who interact with the courts as expert witnesses or consultants. Whilst there are variations across borders, the benefit of understanding different systems is discussed.

The irregular migration of people as a result of conflicts can result in tragedy particularly in sea crossings. The victims' bodies need identification, yet problems occur in the absence of records. Additional ethical problems are experienced when the immigrants are living children. Not only is identification needed but also age clarification – again this is usually confounded by scarce documentation.

The commercialization of dentistry is a constant item of general discussion and is always proclaimed to be 'worse now than in the past' yet there are contemporary ethical aspects of this perennial topic. More and more dentists are required to translate immediate and long-term dental care – especially resulting from trauma – into monetary terms either for court decisions or for no-fault compensation. They are also required to determine pre-existing conditions for exclusion. Conflict of interest situations may arise for those treating the patient as well as concerns for justice and beneficence. Information is so widely available via the Internet, that patients may feel confident to direct their own treatment or demand inappropriate treatment. That the line between a profession and a business service is blurring, provides a rich source for discussion on contemporary ethics. Several papers cover these topics.

In those countries with the financial ability to provide dental services to the disadvantaged, the distinction between requiring a level of personal responsibility for oral health and providing support for those in need is emerging as topic for debate. A paper supplies the opportunity for reflection on this issue. Another paper provides the results of a survey of dentists treating patients with a mental health disability. It reports on the level of restraint that respondents found to be acceptable and the emotional toll on the treating dentist. A further paper presents the difficulty in satisfying both the best practice in dentistry and the rights of an individual to adhere to religious practices. It describes the DVI procedures following the 2004 tsunami in Aceh, with a focus on the cultural and religious accommodations made during a mass disaster in a tropical country with limited resources.

All the papers in this supplement were developed out of oral presentations at the IDEALS Congress in 2012 in Leuven. They were refereed before being accepted for publication. It has been a privilege for IDEALS to be able to work with IOFOS and to be able to publish this supplement in the JFOS.

I hope that you enjoy reading them, but more importantly that you are sufficiently stimulated and challenged by the ethical and legal problems to discuss them with your friends and colleagues.

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