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UNITED STATES DENTAL EDUCATION DEBT LOAD AND THE IMPACT ON DENTAL ETHICS AND PRACTICE LIABILITY

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The severe increase in the expense of dental education in the United States is having an effect on the dental profession. The resultant increase in concomitant debt load appears to be having an impact on the frequency of certain types of dental malpractice claims within new to practice dental graduates. Additionally, this debt load appears to be contributing to a shift in the practice platform that new to practice dental practitioners are pursuing. Claims data appears to be reflecting that new to practice graduates:

- 1. may be influenced into overtreatment planning patients*
- 2. are practicing beyond their level of experience and competence*
- 3. are engaging in practices for which they may have had little or no formal training*
- 4. have decreased the amount of referrals to specialty practitioners, specifically Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons and Endodontists*
- 5. are engaging in marketing practices such as sleep dentistry and sedation and peri-cosmetic techniques.*
- 6. are engaging in financial and credit practices which may increase exposure to the practice,*
- 7. are increasing the expanding segment of practice involving dental implants*

These claims trends will be discussed as well as the potential impact of debt load concerns on the professionalism and ethical practice in new to practice dental graduates.

KEYWORDS: Forensic Odontology, Ethics, Liability.