

# A Guide to Peer Review

*An Impartial Complaint Resolution Alternative*

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**New York State**  
Dental Association

NYSDA Council on Peer Review and Quality Assurance

# The New York State Dental Association

A constituent of the American Dental Association established by an act of the New York State Legislature in 1868.

*“The object of the Association shall be to encourage the improvement of the health of the public, to promote the art and science of dentistry, and to represent the interests of the members of the profession and the public which it serves.”*

Peer Review is the quality assurance process for the dental professional association in New York. Members of the New York State Dental Association (NYSDA) are required to participate and to abide by the decisions rendered by the Peer Review Committee.

This guide provides a summary of the policies and procedures for NYSDA’s Peer Review and Quality Assurance program. Additional information regarding the Peer Review process is available from NYSDA and its local component dental societies.

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## What You Need to Know:

Peer Review is an alternative way to settle complaints about dental treatment provided by dentists who are NYSDA members.

**Complaint Resolution Option:** Peer Review is one of several ways which may be available to resolve a patient's complaint. Peer Review cannot resolve complaints under review or resolved by the courts or other regulatory agencies.

**Fair:** Peer Review is an impartial, confidential way to resolve complaints about the appropriateness of care and quality of treatment performed by NYSDA member dentists.

**Convenient And Timely:** Peer Review is provided by each of NYSDA's 13 local dental societies. This allows patients to participate in the geographic area where treatment was performed.

**Uniform Protocols:** Peer Review is conducted by committees of volunteer dentists in accordance with the NYSDA Peer Review Manual and the NYSDA Agreement to Submit to Peer Review.

**Free:** There is no charge for this service.

**Decision Based On Quality Of Treatment:** Peer Review decisions are based on the quality of the treatment provided as determined by an impartial committee of volunteer dentists.

**If The Peer Review Committee Finds In Favor Of The Patient:** The dentist must refund the fees paid for the treatment. No refund can be greater than the amount the patient actually paid for the treatment. If the Peer Review Committee finds that treatment is appropriate and of acceptable quality, the dentist will keep the fees charged.

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**Fees:** Patients are required to deposit any outstanding fees owed to the dentist in an escrow account pending the outcome of the Peer Review.

**Accounts In Collection:** If the dentist has commenced a collection action relating to the fees for the treatment that is the subject of the complaint, the dentist is required to withdraw/cease the collection action. The dentist's failure to do so will result in termination of the Peer Review with the dentist being deemed out-of-compliance with the Peer Review process and NYSDA policy.

**Patient Examinations:** Because decisions are based on a clinical evaluation by members of the Peer Review Committee, patients are required to attend the Peer Review Hearing and be examined by members of the Peer Review Committee in New York State. If the patient is unwilling to attend a Peer Review hearing, he/she will be deemed out of compliance with the *Agreement to Submit to Peer Review*. The case then will be closed with a finding in favor of the dentist because the patient has failed to substantiate the complaint.

## The Agreement to Submit to Peer Review

- The *Agreement to Submit to Peer Review* is a legally binding contract.
- Peer Review is a form of common-law, contractual arbitration. Both patients and dentists agree that the decision and award of the Peer Review Committee shall be binding.
- NYSDA's Peer Review process has been upheld by New York State's courts as a matter of contract law.
- All participants agree to waive the right to sue the other party on the facts or issues decided by the Peer Review Committee in any court action or proceedings.
- Please read the *Agreement to Submit to Peer Review* carefully before signing and submitting to the local Dental Society.
- Parties are urged to consult with their attorneys prior to signing the *Agreement to Submit to Peer Review*

## Peer Review Can Resolve My Complaint:

- If the dentist is a member of the New York State Dental Association when the *Agreement to Submit to Peer Review* is submitted.
- If the complaint is about appropriateness of treatment or quality of care.

## When Peer Review Cannot Resolve A Complaint:

- The dentist involved or his/her employer-dentist is not a NYSDA member and refuses to participate in the Peer Review process.
- The treatment was performed in a dental school, clinic, or hospital, or paid for by Medicaid or Medicare.
- More than 2½ years have passed since the treatment submitted for Peer Review was completed.
- The complaint is ONLY about the fees charged for the treatment, not the quality of care.
- The patient refuses to place any outstanding balance for the treatment in question in the Dental Society's escrow account pending the outcome of the Peer Review.
- The patient has submitted a complaint about the same treatment to the New York State Education Department's Office of Professional Discipline and that complaint has not been dismissed on jurisdictional grounds.
- The patient has signed a valid "release from liability" or other waiver of future action relating to the treatment that is the subject of the complaint.
- Either the patient or dentist has commenced litigation against the other, the subject of which is the matter submitted for Peer Review or a matter related to the one submitted to Peer Review, and such litigation is ongoing or resolved.

## Confidentiality and Disclosure

Peer Review proceedings are confidential. NYSDA does not report the outcome of a Peer Review to any party or agency. Both patients and dentists agree to keep the Peer Review proceedings in strict confidence in accordance with the provisions specified in the *Agreement to Submit to Peer Review*. The confidential nature of the Peer Review proceedings is further protected by New York State Education law, section 6527.

All parties to the Peer Review receive copies of the *Agreement* and decision letter. You should keep these materials for your own records. At the conclusion of a Peer Review, the local Dental Society will send all related case documents to NYSDA. NYSDA will destroy all records with the exception of the *Agreement to Submit to Peer Review* and the decision letter.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q: Is Peer Review fair?**

A: Peer Review Committees are impartial and committed to improving the quality of dental treatment.

### **Q: How does a Peer Review begin?**

A: To begin the Peer Review process, the patient must submit an *Agreement to Submit to Peer Review* to the local Dental Society. In the spaces provided for the "Patient's Statement" on the *Agreement*, the patient explains what dental treatment was performed, who performed the treatment, what the complaint is, how much it cost, and when he/she was treated. The patient should enclose copies of any documentation of the charges and payments (e.g., insurance statements, bills, canceled checks, etc.). If seen by any other dentists, patients should ask those dentists to send copies of related records and x-rays to the Dental Society.

### **Q: What does the Dental Society do when it receives an *Agreement to Submit to Peer Review* from a patient?**

A: The Dental Society sends the *Agreement* to the dentist the patient is complaining about for his/her statement and signature. NYSDA member dentists are required to participate in Peer Review. The dentist must return copies of the patient's treatment records and financial information to the Dental Society with the *Agreement*.

### **Q: What happens next?**

A: The Peer Review Committee then determines whether the complaint can be resolved by Peer Review. If eligible for Peer Review, mediation will be conducted. A mediator will contact both the patient and dentist. If the dentist offers a full refund, the patient will receive the refund and the case will be closed. No refund can be greater than the amount the patient actually paid for the treatment. If the dentist offers less than the fees paid and the offer is acceptable to the patient, the case will be closed. If the complaint is not settled by mediation, a hearing will be held.



**Q: Do I need an attorney?**

A: *The Agreement to Submit to Peer Review* is a contract. You are encouraged to have an attorney review the *Agreement* before you sign. You have the right to be represented by a lawyer, but it is not required. Peer Review hearings focus only on the Peer Review Committee's evaluation of the dental treatment. Both the patient and dentist waive the right to "cross examine". If you are being represented by an attorney, your attorney must notify the Dental Society. Peer Review will not award money to cover the attorney's charges.

**Q: What if the patient owes the dentist money for the treatment?**

A: If the patient has an outstanding balance for the cost of the treatment, the patient is required to place that amount in the Dental Society's escrow account at the start of Peer Review.

**Q: What if the patient wants the dentist to pay for new treatment?**

A: If Peer Review settles the complaint, either by mediation or a hearing, the most money the dentist can return to the patient is the actual amount of the fees charged. Peer Review cannot result in awards greater than the fees actually charged.

**Q: Who comes to the Peer Review hearing?**

A: Peer Review hearings are attended only by the patient, the dentist(s), the Peer Review Committee chairperson, and three examining Committee members. Dental Society support staff and a non-dentist patient advocate may also attend. If you are represented by an attorney, your attorney may attend and represent you at the hearing. Sometimes, the chairperson may invite others to attend, e.g., translators, aids, or committee trainees. These people do not participate in the hearing.

**Q: What happens at a Peer Review hearing?**

A: Hearings are conducted at the local Dental Society office or another clinic location. You will be notified in writing of the date and time, and who will serve on the Peer Review Committee. You should notify the Dental Society if you have reason to believe any Committee member may not be impartial. The patient should notify the Dental Society if any member of the Committee has treated them.

At the hearing, the patient will explain their complaint and the dentist can respond. There is no "cross examination". The Peer Review Committee will review all of the records and materials submitted. Each Committee member will examine the patient. After the Peer Review Committee reaches a decision, you will be notified of the decision in writing.

**Q: What happens if the Peer Review Committee finds in favor of the patient?**

A: If the Committee finds in the patient's favor (the complaint is upheld), the dentist must refund the fees paid for the treatment. No refund can be greater than the amount the patient actually paid for treatment. If the Peer Review Committee finds that treatment is appropriate and of acceptable quality, the dentist will keep the fees charged.

**Q: What if the patient's insurance company paid for all or part of the treatment?**

A: All fee refunds are made to the patient. If required, the patient is responsible for notifying an insurer of any refund.

**Q: What if the patient decides to withdraw from the Peer Review?**

A: If the patient violates the *Agreement to Submit to Peer Review* by withdrawing the complaint, any money in the Dental Society's escrow account will be returned to the treating dentist.

**Q: Should the patient discuss Peer Review with their new dentist?**

A: Peer Review is confidential. A patient cannot discuss Peer Review with their new dentist.

**Q: What if you disagree with the Peer Review Committee's decision?**

A: The dentist or patient may appeal the decision of the Peer Review Committee within 30 days after the date of the decision letter reporting the findings of the Peer Review Committee. Appeals are considered on the basis of:

- A significant prejudicial, procedural irregularity that would be likely to affect the outcome of the case, or:
- The discovery of significant new evidence that, with due diligence, could not have been available at the time of the hearing and would have been likely to affect the outcome of the case.

Requests for appeal must include documentation of the specific procedural irregularity and/or the actual new evidence upon which the request for appeal is based. Even where an appeal is granted, the prior decision remains in full force and effect until a final decision is rendered on a rehearing.

Dentist requests for appeal will be considered only when any fees required for refund have been deposited in the Dental Society's escrow account.

Requests for appeal are reviewed and granted by the NYSDA Council on Peer Review and Quality Assurance. This council is composed of a chairperson and one representative from each of the 13 component dental societies.

Requests for appeal are submitted to:

Chairman, Council on Peer Review and Quality Assurance  
The New York State Dental Association  
20 Corporate Woods Blvd., Ste. 602  
Albany, NY 12211

**Q: After Peer Review, can the patient sue the dentist?**

A: The outcome of the Peer Review is final. Peer Review is based on an *Agreement to Submit to Peer Review* signed by both the patient and dentist. This *Agreement* is a contract. In the contract, both agree to a list of conditions included on the back page of the *Agreement*. You both agree to use Peer Review to resolve the complaint, to accept the decision of the Peer Review Committee, and not to sue the other party.

# New York State Dental Association Component Dental Societies

## **New York County Dental Society**

6 E. 43rd St., 11th Floor  
New York, NY 10017  
(212) 573-8500

## **Second District Dental Society**

111 Ft. Greene Place  
Brooklyn, NY 11217  
(718) 522-3939

•Kings (Brooklyn) •Richmond (Staten Island)

## **Third District Dental Society**

950 New Loudon Road, Ste. 108  
Latham, NY 12110  
(518) 782-1428

•Albany •Columbia •Greene •Rensselaer •Sullivan •Ulster

## **Fourth District Dental Society**

632 Plank Road, Suite 200  
Clifton Park, NY 12065  
(518) 371-1114

•Clinton •Essex •Franklin •Fulton •Hamilton •Montgomery  
•Saratoga •Schenectady •Schoharie •Warren •Washington

## **Fifth District Dental Society**

6323 Fly Road, Ste. 3  
E. Syracuse, NY 13057  
(315) 434-9161

•Herkimer •Jefferson •Lewis •Madison •Oneida •Onondaga  
•Oswego •St. Lawrence

## **Sixth District Dental Society**

55 Oak Street  
Binghamton, NY 13905  
(607) 724-1781

•Broome •Chemung •Chenango •Cortland •Delaware •Otsego  
•Schuyler •Tioga •Tompkins

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**Seventh District Dental Society**

255 Woodcliff Dr.

Fairport, NY 14450

(585) 385-9550

•Cayuga •Livingston •Monroe •Ontario •Seneca •Steuben  
•Wayne •Yates

**Eighth District Dental Society**

3831 Harlem Road

Buffalo, NY 14215

(716) 995-6300

•Allegany •Cattaraugus •Chautauqua •Erie •Genesee •Niagara  
•Orleans •Wyoming

**Ninth District Dental Association**

364 Elwood Avenue

Hawthorne, NY 10532

(914) 747-1199

•Dutchess •Orange •Putnam •Rockland •Westchester

**Nassau County Dental Society**

377 Oak Street, #204

Garden City, NY 11530

(516) 227-1112

**Queens County Dental Society**

86-90 188th Street

Jamaica, NY 11423

(718) 454-8344

**Suffolk County Dental Society**

150 Motor Parkway, Suite 105

Hauppauge, NY 11788

(631) 232-1400

**Bronx County Dental Society**

3201 Grand Concourse, #2N

Bronx, NY 10468

(718) 733-2031

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New York State Dental Association

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Albany, New York 12211

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