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commentary on the addition of a new principle of dental ethics. Dr. Robert Iovino, an oral surgeon and dental ethicist, authored the commentary, proposing this new principle be developed to accommodate advances in genetic science.

The ADA Code has been a living document, continuously evaluated and updated since its inception, so it is not surprising to see this proposal made. The new principle that Dr. Iovino has proposed is called “respect for human dignity.” He argues that the addition of this principle ‘will help to serve better to provide the foundation of a dentist’s professional obligations in a new era of genetics in dental research, education and practice’¹.

Dr. Iovino also highlights that the AMA Code of Ethics has already given the principle of respect for human dignity a prominent role. It has also proactively incorporated multiple guidelines relating to genetic medicine in its code as well. He argues the ADA should follow suit since the new principle would be “equipped to serve as a foundation of guidelines, sensible limits and rules, and even, when necessary, taboos on questionable gene-based research projects and clinical protocols”².

This proposal comes after another recent Guest Editorial in JADA in August of 2016 by Drs. John W. Kusiak and Martha Somerman regarding the impact “big data” on dental practice. They discuss how dental practitioners and dental research-

ers are each developing large and varied data sets which include sensitive patient information found in electronic health records (EHRs). They argue that it is essential that as a profession we develop modes for secure data transmission and exchange in order to provide the appropriate safeguards for patient privacy³.

Maintaining patient confidentiality in data sharing is of utmost importance and a fundamental part of the principle of Autonomy. In Section 1.B. the ADA Code states that on the subject of Patient Records: “Dentists are obliged to safeguard the confidentiality of patient records. Dentists shall maintain patient records in a manner consistent with the protection of the welfare of the patient.”

As a profession, we are obliged to continue to anticipate and adapt to new challenges that develop with time. We live in an exciting time of an increasing number of advances in both genetic science as well as how we are able to share and assess data collected both in our private offices as well as in the research setting. We must continue to remember that, no matter what the setting of our practice, as dental professionals we must always strive to put our patients first. ■

1 Iovino, Robert. Revising the American Dental Association Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct: Adding ‘Respect for Human Dignity’ as the sixth principle of dental ethics to accommodate advances in genetic science. JADA 147(12), December 2016, p. 918.

2 Ibid, p. 920.

3 Kusiak, J * & M. Somerman. Data science at the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research: changing dental practice. JADA 147(8), August 2016, p. 598.



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