



MAY 2014

// CED RESOLUTION

ONLINE EVALUATIONS OF DENTISTS



// INTRODUCTION

The Council of European Dentists (CED) is a European not-for-profit association which represents over 340,000 dental practitioners across Europe through 32 national dental associations and chambers in 30 European countries. Established in 1961 to advise the European Commission on matters relating to the dental profession, the CED key objectives are to promote high standards of oral healthcare and dentistry and effective patient-safety centred professional practice.

In recent years, in some Member States, there has been a rise in popularity of websites allowing patients to submit online reviews rating their local dental practice or individual dentist. Patients sometimes use such online review websites to make a decision and judge whether or not they will visit a particular dentist.

// TRANSPARENCY OF CONTENT

The CED supports patients' feedback to help dentists maintain high standards and improve patient experience in their practices but is concerned with websites posting anonymous reviews which lack moderation. Indeed, most of these websites are not subject to any certification or code of conduct, making dentists an especially attractive target for anonymous reviews. There may therefore be little or no control of whether a reviewer is a genuine patient of the practice sharing their experience, or, for example, an affiliate of the practice or a competitor. The reviews may be overly positive or detrimental, false or offensive. It is important that the information is not infringing the rights of individual dentists or offending them. Therefore, the CED believes that there is a need for moderation of such sites to ensure they paint a true picture of the service provided, and that patients should only comment on treatment and services that they have personally received.

// ACCOUNTABILITY FOR CONTENT OF WEBSITES

In order to boost patient confidence in such websites and foster best practice, it is in the interest of the owners/administrators of such websites to offer high-quality and reliable information to their clients. The CED recommends that a set of quality criteria for websites reviewing dentists should be developed in order to ensure that patients are provided with fair and accurate information.

A first attempt at establishing quality criteria at EU level was undertaken in 2002 when the European Council supported an initiative within the eEurope2002 to develop a core set of *Quality Criteria for Health Related Websites*. As part of this work, the European Commission published a communication¹ outlining its quality criteria for websites offering health-related information to patients.

In the meantime, in some Member States, specific quality criteria for websites providing online evaluations of dentists have been developed and adopted².

¹ Communication on eEurope 2002: Quality Criteria for Health related Websites:

http://eur-lex.europa.eu/smartapi/cgi/sga_doc?smartapi!celexplus!prod!CELEXnumdoc&numdoc=52002DC0667&lg=en

² For example, in Germany, the KZBV and BZÄK have produced *Gute Praxis – Bewertungsportale*.

// RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PATIENT FEEDBACK WEBSITES

Considering the above, the CED recommends the following quality criteria for online evaluation of dentists:

- Internet-based content should comply with national legislation and the EU Data Protection Directive³ which requires that personal data must be collected and processed fairly and lawfully;
- The website owner is identified;
- The dentist is informed of the purposes of the processing, the categories of data concerned, the recipients or categories of recipients, the existence of the right of access to and the right to rectify the data concerning him/her.
- Contact details of the website owner are provided;
- Financial supporters of the site are identified;
- Information on when a page was last updated is provided throughout the site;
- A privacy statement and policies for data management, deletion and transfer to third parties are included;
- A clear distinction is made between content and advertising;
- A search facility to find individual dentists is provided;
- The evaluation system is easy to understand ;
- A declaration that all posts are individual, personal opinions of patients is included:
- Patients are required to confirm that they have personally received the treatment or services on which they are commenting;
- All contributions are monitored and, where necessary, edited or removed;
- There is an opportunity for dentists to reply and/or object to comments;
- There is protection against misleading claims and offensive comments;
- Contributors should be identifiable by the website owner through an appropriate registration process or other means of electronic identification. The online evaluations may stay anonymous.

The CED encourages national dental associations to develop tools confirming the compliance of evaluation websites with the above-mentioned criteria.

Adopted by the CED General Meeting on 23 May 2014

³ 95/46/EC directive :

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:01995L0046-20031120&qid=1397655657115&from=EN>

The 95/46 directive is going to be revised by a new regulation still in discussion.