



COLLEGE OF GENERAL DENTISTRY

Response of the College of General Dentistry to the GDC consultation,

The Framework for Professionalism: a new approach to setting standards and providing guidance to the dental team

The College welcomes the opportunity to respond to the GDC's consultation on the proposed Framework for Professionalism (*Framework*). We support the ambition to develop a modern framework that promotes professional judgement, maintains public confidence and reflects the realities of contemporary oral healthcare practice.

About the College

The College is confidently establishing itself as the uniquely inclusive professional body for the whole of the regulated oral health team. Its brief extends across the United Kingdom and beyond, spanning NHS and private practice. We set standards for clinical practice, support career development, and nurture the professional community on which a shared understanding of professionalism depends.

Response to the proposed change of approach

We believe it is essential for the GDC's *Framework* to speak to the individual and shared professional responsibilities of all registrants. Oral healthcare is increasingly delivered through integrated, multidisciplinary teams, and professionalism should be understood as an individual and collective commitment that unites all regulated oral healthcare professionals around common values, behaviours and standards of patient care. The framework should therefore be relevant and meaningful to every part of the registered workforce, regardless of professional title, role or practice setting (including, indeed, those whose role is not chair-side or Dentist-led). It might further acknowledge that holistic care extends beyond the roles defined under GDC regulation.

The College recognises the rationale for moving towards a more outcomes-focused approach to professionalism, rather than one founded primarily on detailed rules and prescribed behaviours. Healthcare delivery continues to evolve rapidly in response to

changes in patient expectations, service models, workforce structures and technology. A principles-based framework, focused on outcomes and professional behaviours, has the potential to provide greater flexibility, enabling registrants to exercise appropriate judgement in complex and varied situations.

Such an approach is also better able to accommodate the evolution of professional standards and societal expectations over time without requiring constant revision of detailed rules and guidance.

At the same time, we are conscious of the practical challenges associated with implementing a principles-based framework within a regulated professional community that has traditionally operated within clearly defined boundaries and rules. Many registrants derive confidence from understanding precisely where those boundaries lie, particularly when faced with difficult professional or ethical decisions. While a principles-based approach offers important advantages, it can also create uncertainty if practitioners do not feel adequately supported in applying broad principles to real-world situations – or trust those standing in judgement of their practice. The success of the framework will therefore depend not only on the principles themselves, but also on the extent to which registrants are equipped to interpret and apply them consistently and confidently. That is, to some extent, a significant culture change, placing new expectations of agency and responsibility on the practitioner.

The role of the College

In a mature and well-functioning regulated profession, there is an important complementary relationship between the regulator and the professional body. While the regulator establishes the overarching framework and expectations, professional bodies can play a vital role in supporting practitioners to understand, interpret and apply those expectations in day-to-day practice. Through guidance, education, professional development, reflective learning and the sharing of good practice, professional bodies can help bridge the gap between high-level principles and practical decision-making.

The College stands ready to play a strategic role in that respect, for the oral healthcare professions. Consistent with our mission to foster high standards of professionalism across the regulated oral health team, we are committed to supporting practitioners as they adapt to an evolving regulatory environment. We believe that the transition to a more principles-based approach will be most successful when accompanied by appropriate professional guidance and educational support that builds confidence, encourages reflection and promotes consistent understanding across the profession.

We are well equipped to perform this role, with an international reputation for propagating trustworthy standards for practice, across many aspects of clinical

practice. We are working to build the capacity required over time to accommodate that greater responsibility.

In summary

We therefore support the direction of travel proposed by the GDC, while emphasising the importance of ensuring that registrants are adequately supported in navigating this change. By combining a clear outcomes-focused framework with strong professional leadership and practical guidance, there is an opportunity to strengthen professionalism across the oral healthcare workforce, enhance public trust, and support the delivery of high-quality patient care across all sectors of UK dentistry.