

Twenty Simple Rules to Help Prevent Malpractice Suits

1. Avoid arguments with patients who complain of grievances, real or fanaticized.
2. Keep complete and accurate records.
3. Refrain from guaranteeing or even promising perfect results.
4. Follow approved methods of practice.
5. Be just as careful in your post-operative treatment as in the main operation.
6. When faced with an extraordinary situation do not mark time, delay or otherwise avoid the issue. You should face it squarely and if in doubt call in another dentist for consultation, preferably a specialist in the particular type of treatment.
7. Never conceal any important facts from your patient, even where you fancy the patient will never discover the error, mistake or poor result e.g. broken root canal instrument.
8. When confronted by a serious question of law pertaining to dental practice, you should seek the advice of your lawyer before making any statement.
9. Do not criticize another practitioner's services.
10. Do not make a statement that may be construed by the patient as an admission of fault or guilt on your part.
11. Avoid accidents in the handling of caustic medicaments, burs and discs.
12. Make judicious use of x-rays. Some courts are holding the doctor negligent who fails to use x-rays. Interpret the x-ray properly. Keep the x-ray machine in good repair. Also consult a liability insurance agent.
13. Use an assistant when general anaesthesia or hypnosis is used.
14. Do not inform your patient or his representative that you carry malpractice insurance.
15. Courts require original records – SAVE THEM.
16. Check and double check the following:
 - a) The manufacturer's instructions or warning on drugs or appliances.
 - b) The labelling and contents of bottles and containers
 - c) The effect of any appliance used.
17. Have an understanding on fees before beginning treatment.
18. Avoid short cuts in arriving at diagnosis.
19. Show personal interest in your patient's progress and comfort.