

SUPPORTING AND INFORMING YOUNG DENTISTS IN RELATION TO CORPORATE DENTISTRY

Introduction:

The Council of European Dentists (CED) is a European not-for-profit association which represents over 340,000 dentists across Europe. The association was established in 1961 and is now composed of 33 national dental associations from 31 European countries.

Corporate dentistry chains are on the rise in many European countries. This growth in numbers also means that chains are seeking a qualified workforce, especially dentists, and often targeting young dentists who have just graduated and even students of dentistry, for future work opportunities. This, combined with the reduced interest in owning practices among the new generation of dentists, could lead in the near future to more dental practitioners considering corporate chains as their workplaces rather than setting up their own dental offices. For example, more young dentists are opting to join corporates due to the significant administrative burden and financial risks of starting their own practice, and in some instances, due to a preference for being part of a larger practice.

The CED prepared the following document to serve as a frame guidance for the national dental chambers and associations, highlighting some of the main principles for ensuring that young dentists are informed and aware of the topic of corporate dentistry at their respective national levels. Each national organization is encouraged to elaborate information materials which consider the issues indicated below, adapting them to their national or local situation – organizational, legal and financial. The CED will be happy to assist in the exchange of such materials between CED members so that each national organization can benefit from the experience and ideas of others.

Ensuring that young dentists are aware of corporate dentistry and the related implications:

- **Young dentists must be thoroughly informed and comprehensively advised about the choice of becoming a liberal practitioner who runs his/her own dental office versus working in a dental corporate chain;** such information should be delivered to them at as an early stage as possible, optimally while they are still studying dentistry. Information and explanations can be provided via national dental associations' information channels and in collaboration with dental students' organizations. Real-life examples of issues that a dentist may be facing in his/her own dental office and when working for a corporate entity, as well as recommendations on possible solutions, are very welcome and facilitate provision of this kind of knowledge.
- **Young dentists must be aware of all aspects of owning their practice versus joining a corporate chain** – this includes, but is not limited to, legal implications, administrative requirements, business management issues, day-to-day work life, and professional and personal life balance, opportunities for professional growth and development. Such encompassing awareness of the different options for joining the field of dental work must be explained clearly and in detail, including through real-life examples of professionals who chose to join either option.
- **Young dentists should be encouraged to consider commencing their practice in the capacity of full ownership and empowerment in relation to their ethical and moral**

obligations as healthcare professionals. Whatever their choice of workplace is, young dentists must be aware that it is their obligation to ensure that the professional codes of conduct and autonomy they are bound by are always taking precedence, including when working in a corporate chain. They must know that a dentist is always bound by the rules of professional ethics and the dentist has to defend his/her clinical independence and autonomy and take decisions based on the medical needs of the patient. Within a corporate model of dentistry it is also crucial for the dentist to duly observe the principle of patient confidentiality and confidentiality of medical records.

This also includes raising concerns and seeking guidance via the national dental chambers and associations in cases when they feel they are being placed in a position that 1) places the health and care of the patient in second place, in favor of financial profit and 2) when their own ethics and professional code of conduct are under threat due to incorrect practices within the dental chain.

- **If they opt for corporate dentistry, young dentists should seek to join those dental chains where at least the clinical management and decision-making are placed in the hands of dentists:** this is a general principle that should be incorporated in the existence of all dental chains, even those which in some countries are owned by non-professionals. National Dental Chambers and Associations may seek legislation enforcing a minimum mandatory ownership percentage by dentists, in a dental chain when owned by non-professionals. In the case of young dental professionals, it is also crucially important in ensuring that their first professional steps are taken in a work environment that places health and ethics first. It is recommended that young dentists negotiate a collective bargaining agreement when employed by a dental chain.

It is also important that young dentists should consider having their own professional liability insurance, even if it is not legally required for dentists working in a corporate chain – and national dental chambers and associations are usually able to offer collective insurances for their members.

- **The continuity between different generations in dentistry should be encouraged. As per the existing CED *White Paper on Workforce Challenges in Dentistry*,** a ‘generational pact’ aiming to embolden young dentists as much as possible should be promoted through the national dental chambers and associations, ensuring that alternatives and experienced advice are offered to new dental graduates.
- **Opportunities in cases when young dentists choose to open and manage their own practices must be provided** – this also includes situations where currently, corporate dentistry has more purchasing power, e.g. in situations for obtaining dental equipment and also when negotiating contracts for dental services. Preferential options for financial support (e.g. loans) for young dentists to open their own practices must also be encouraged. Furthermore, opting to open a practice in rural/remote areas must also provide incentives for spouse career opportunities and child education, as already recommended in the *CED White Paper on Workforce Challenges in Dentistry*. This is especially valid for young dentists. National dental chambers and associations should be active in advocating and implementing such solutions at the national level.

-ENDS-

Adopted at the CED General Meeting in November 2024