

Student professionalism and fitness to practise Standards for the Dental Team Case studies

Principle 9

Make sure your personal behaviour maintains patients' confidence in you and the dental profession



Elodie

Elodie is a 23 year old student dental therapist who has been experimenting with drugs at the weekends since she was 19. Recently her drug taking has increased.

Student dental therapist

Elodie's drug taking has increased following the break-up of her relationship with her boyfriend and her parents' recent divorce. The other students she shares a house with have noticed this is affecting her health and how she behaves. Elodie's tutors had noticed that over the past couple of months her attendance wasn't as good as it usually was and she had been sent home on one occasion for lack of concentration in clinic. She explained this was due to tiredness after a virus. Elodie has been caught at a club in possession of a class A drug and now received a caution from the police. She is very worried about what has happened and doesn't know what to do next. Her tutor has overheard her friends (other students on the course) talking about her problems.

What do you think Elodie should do next?

Select an option:

- Tell a member of staff on the course
- Tell her doctor
- Leave the course

See what Elodie did next...

Elodie's supervisor spoke to her as soon as they overheard the conversation. Elodie was reluctant to say anything. Her tutor emphasised that problems can be sorted out with her input and her recognition that there is an issue. Elodie then explained what had happened and that she was worried about her health and being able to continue on the course. Her tutor said Elodie had done the right thing telling the full story and that this was not the first time this has happened to a student. Her tutor then described what support options are available to Elodie (eg Counselling Services, Occupational Health Referral, Drug Support Agencies, Elodie's GP, her family, friends and staff).

Her tutor explained that they had to report the situation via the student fitness to practise process for patient safety purposes and that the issues weren't compatible with GDC standards. Elodie was advised that she would need to be suspended from the programme until arrangements were in place to address her health issues and to give consideration to the police caution. Elodie was made aware that if she were able to continue with her studies she would be required to declare her health issues and caution on her GDC application.

The support that was put in place enabled Elodie to sort out the problems and change her lifestyle. She is doing well under the supervision of her GP and has completed her training programme. The caution and her health issues were noted on her application form and she received a letter from the GDC following the guidance on criminal convictions and cautions. The GDC also requested confirmation from Elodie's GP and other health professionals involved in her care about her rehabilitation. Character references from tutors, employers, family and friends were also helpful.

See what Elodie's friends did next

One of Elodie's friends on the programme went to see the student support officer, in confidence, who advised her to tell the tutor on the programme. This was important so patients were not put at risk and that they could put a programme of support in place as soon as possible for Elodie to help with both her worries and drug taking. Her friend did this immediately and explained how worried they were. The tutor confirmed it was the right thing to do to bring it to their attention for both the patients and the student.

GDC principles

9.1 You must ensure that your conduct, both at work and in your personal life, justifies patients trust in you and the public's trust in the dental profession

9.3 You must inform the GDC if you are subject to criminal proceedings or a regulatory finding is made against you, anywhere in the world

1.7.7 If you believe that patients might be at risk because of your health, behaviour or professional performance or that of a colleague, or because of any aspect of the clinical environment, you must take prompt and appropriate action.

8.1.1 You must raise any concern that patients might be at risk due to:

- the health, behaviour or professional performance of a colleague;
- any aspect of the environment where treatment is provided; or
- someone asking you to do something that you think conflicts with your duties to put patients interests first and act to protect them.

You must raise a concern even if you are not in a position to control or influence your working environment. Your duty to raise concerns overrides any personal and professional loyalties or concerns you might have (for example, seeming disloyal or being treated differently by your colleagues or managers).

Other guidance

With regards to first time registration or a restoration application, we advise applicants to read the following guidance:

- [Convictions and cautions guidance](#) (available on our website). This explains how we look into cautions and convictions. We look at these on a case-by-case basis.
- [Health self-certification guidance](#)

Discussion points

- Have you found that pressures outside of study have affected your behaviour? Did you seek help and advice?
- Are you worried about a friend on your course? If you are, do you know where you can ask for advice and what to do?
- Explore how you might feel about having to tell someone in authority about the behaviour of one of your friends. What support might you need to do this and what might you need afterwards if your intervention had repercussions for your friend?

Disclaimer

These fictional case studies are for illustration purposes only and should not be relied on to make clinical decisions. Their aim is to put GDC guidance in context, exploring how some of the principles might work in practice.

The case studies cannot be relied on to be clinically accurate. Nor do the case studies intend to show the "correct" interpretation of GDC guidance, only one (or more) possible interpretation(s).