

Analysis of the profiles of dentists of Londrina (Paraná, Brazil) on Instagram: ethical aspects of advertising and publicity

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Abstract Dentistry has entered social networks as a way to attract and retain patients. The professional, sometimes, is not aware of ethical norms for using publicity/advertisement on the internet, many times committing ethical infractions regarding these behaviors. The aim of this research was to analyze the public (open access) profiles of dentists (DE) in the municipality of Londrina (PR) on the social network Instagram™ in view of the aspects of publicity and advertisement characterized in the Code of Dental Ethics (CDE). A list of active DEs in the city of Londrina, made available by the Regional Council of Dentistry of Paraná, was used. As inclusion criterion, it was necessary that the dentist had public profile and characterized as a professional in the area, excluding private profiles, without identifications, without publications and only with personal publications. After selection, each profile was evaluated separately, taking into account the last ten posts, according to nine pre-established items based on CDE. A total of 213 profiles that met the inclusion criteria were identified, 137 in disagreement with CDE and 76 in agreement. Most profiles analyzed violated one or more items that were evaluated, with the exhibition of “before and after” images being the most frequently found item.

Descriptors: Forensic Dentistry. Ethics, Dental. Social Networking. Publicity. Advertising.

Análisis de los perfiles de odontólogos de Londrina (Paraná, Brasil) en Instagram: aspectos éticos de la publicidad y propaganda

Resumen La Odontología ha entrado en las redes sociales como una forma de atraer y fidelizar pacientes. El profesional, en ocasiones, no es consciente de las normas éticas para el uso de publicidad/propaganda en *internet*, cometiendo infracciones éticas en relación con estas conductas. El objetivo de esta investigación fue analizar los perfiles públicos (acceso abierto) de los odontólogos (CD) de la ciudad de Londrina (PR) en la red social Instagram® frente a los aspectos de publicidad y propaganda caracterizados en el Código de Ética Dental (CEO). Se utilizó una lista de CD activos en la ciudad de Londrina, facilitada por el Consejo Regional de Odontología de Paraná. Como criterio de inclusión fue necesario que el CD tuviera perfil público y caracterizado como profesional del área, excluyendo perfiles privados, sin identificaciones, sin publicaciones y solo con publicaciones personales. Luego de la selección, cada perfil fue evaluado por separado, teniendo en cuenta los últimos diez cargos, según nueve ítems preestablecidos en base al CEO. Se identificaron un total de 213 perfiles que cumplían los criterios de inclusión, 137 en desacuerdo con el CEO y 76 de acuerdo. La mayoría de los perfiles analizados violaron uno o más ítems evaluados, siendo la exhibición de imágenes de “antes y después” el ítem encontrado con mayor frecuencia.

Descriptor: Odontología Forense. Ética Odontológica. Red Social. Publicidad. Propaganda.

Análise dos perfis de cirurgiões-dentistas de Londrina (Paraná, Brasil) no Instagram: aspectos éticos de propaganda e publicidade

Resumo A Odontologia tem adentrado nas redes sociais como forma de atrair e manter pacientes. O profissional, por vezes, não está atento às normativas éticas para utilizar a publicidade/propaganda na *internet*, cometendo infrações éticas referente à essas condutas. O objetivo desta pesquisa foi analisar os perfis públicos (de acesso aberto) de cirurgiões-dentistas (CD) do município de Londrina (PR) na rede social *Instagram*® frente aos aspectos da publicidade e propaganda caracterizados no Código de Ética Odontológica (CEO). Foi utilizada uma listagem de CD ativos no município de Londrina,

disponibilizado pelo Conselho Regional de Odontologia do Paraná. Como critério de inclusão, foi necessário que o CD possuísse o perfil público e caracterizado como profissional da área, sendo excluídos os perfis privados, sem identificações, sem publicações e apenas com publicações pessoais. Após a seleção, cada perfil foi avaliado separadamente, levando-se em consideração as dez últimas postagens, de acordo com nove itens pré-estabelecidos tendo como base o CEO. Foram identificados 213 perfis que atendiam aos critérios de inclusão, sendo 137 em desacordo com o CEO e 76 em acordo. A maioria dos perfis analisados infringia um ou mais itens que foram avaliados, sendo a exposição de imagens de “antes e depois” o item encontrado com maior frequência.

Descritores: Odontologia Legal. Ética Odontológica. Rede Social. Publicidade. Propaganda.

INTRODUCTION

The Dentistry labor market has become increasingly competitive as a result of the growing number of professionals¹. Currently, Brazil has around 330,000 dentists, with greater concentration in the Southern and Southeastern regions of the country². Thus, in the current context, it is necessary for dentists (DE) not only to be a good clinician, but also to seek other ways to attract and retain their patients¹.

Currently, much is discussed about the administrative aspects of a dental office, and it is fundamental that dentist view the dental office as a company, including adopting marketing tools as part of the management^{3,4}, observing the ethical and legal precepts of the profession⁵.

Social networks have become widely used advertising tools with great penetration power⁶, such as the Instagram™ application, which brings together more than one billion users, allowing the creation of public or private profiles for sharing photos and videos⁷. In Dentistry, the use of such an application is a growing reality, given the ease of communication through this tool⁸. However, the indiscriminate and uncritical exposure of information related to patients and unauthorized strategies in Dentistry also intensified⁹. In this sense, the professional must act in accordance with the Code of Dental Ethics (CDE) also in the virtual environment, following the regulations contained therein to prevent ethical violations¹⁰.

It was observed that there is a need to debate the subject and to alert dentists about their actions and consequences. Thus, the aim of this study was to analyze the public (open access) profiles of DEs from the municipality of Londrina (PR) on the social network Instagram™ in view of the aspects of advertising and publicity characterized in CDE.

METHODS

This descriptive cross-sectional study was assessed by the Ethics Committee in Research Involving Human Beings of the State University of Londrina (CEP/UEL) and approved under protocol No. 3.776.806 (CAAE: 27044319.2.0000.523).

The profiles of DEs in the municipality of Londrina (PR) were researched based on a list provided by the Regional Council of Dentistry of Paraná (CRO-PR) with the names of 1,585 registered and active professionals.

A search for these DEs was carried out on the Instagram™ social network, using the search tool available in the application itself. Three identification attempts were made: by the professional's full name; by first and last name; and lastly, by first and second names. As inclusion criterion, the profile should be public (open access) and be characterized as a professional in the dental area in the aforementioned social network, excluding private profiles, without identification, without publications and only with personal publications.

After selection, each profile was evaluated separately, taking into account the last ten posts, according to the analysis items: 1) disclosure of biological and/or instrumental material; 2) disclosure of any element that identifies the patient; 3) disclosure of prices; 4) advertisement of free services; 5) disclosure of payment methods; 6) disclosure of

transoperative care; 7) disclosure of false, irregular, illicit or immoral advertising, with the aim of attracting customers; 8) consultation, diagnosis or disclosure of clinical results; 9) before and after pictures.

The results were expressed and analyzed using descriptive quantitative statistics to determine the frequency of data obtained from the analysis in comparison with CDE.

RESULTS

According to CRO-PR, at the time of this research, there were 1,585 registered dentists in the municipality of Londrina – PR. Of this total, 436 (27.5%) were registered on the platform, but only 213 (48.85%) of registered profiles were analyzed because they met the inclusion criteria. The sample and its distribution are described in Table 1.

Table 1. Sample used in the analysis, containing the number of dentists in the municipality of Londrina-PR, those excluded and included in the study.

Sample	Number of dentists	Frequency (%)
Total	1585	100.00
Unidentified	1149	72.49
Excluded	223	14.06
Profile blocked	133	59.64
Profile without publications	20	8.96
Personal profile	70	31.39
Included	213	13.43
Profile in disagreement with CDE	137	64.31
Profile in agreement with CDE	76	35.68

CDE: Code of Dental Ethics

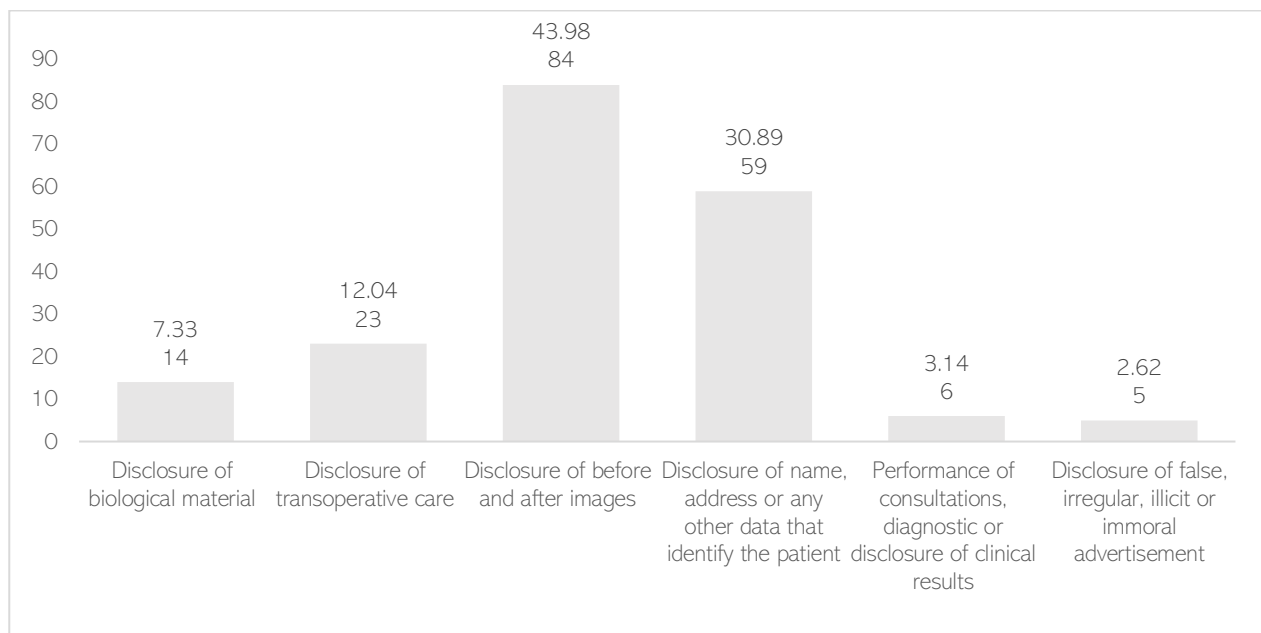
It was observed that of the 213 profiles analyzed, 137 (64.31%) were in disagreement with CDE, infringing at least one of the evaluated items. Some profiles analyzed committed more than one ethical infraction, thus, the total number of posts analyzed in disagreement with CDE were 191, which fit into six of the nine pre-established items. None of the profiles showed price disclosure, advertisement of free services or advertisement of payment methods.

Regarding posts, it was verified the need to segregate some topics to illustrate more clearly the contents found (Table 2). Most posts featured "before and after" images, followed by the use of images that could identify the patient. The ethical infractions included in the six pre-established items are detailed in Figure 1, within the 191 posts with infractions, belonging to the 137 profiles in disagreement with CDE.

Table 2. Content of posts with ethical violations with their respective quantities and frequencies.

Post content	Number of cases	Frequency (%)
Biological Material	5	2.62
Instruments	9	4.71
Transoperative care	23	12.04
Before and After images	84	43.98
Photo/Video of patient	6	3.14
Photo/video with patient	40	20.94
Imaging Examination	13	6.81
Conducting consultations	3	1.57
Irregular advertisement	5	2.62
Diagnosis	3	1.57
Total	191	100.00

Figure 1. Number and frequency of cases with ethical violations of each of the six pre-established items that were found, being analyzed by the total number of posts (191) in disagreement with the Code of Dental Ethics.



DISCUSSION

The Code of Dental Ethics¹¹ contains guidelines on how advertisements and publicity must be performed; however, even today, it is possible to observe that a large number of DEs do not comply with such regulations^{1,8,12}. Among the nine items analyzed in the present study, the use of “before and after” images showed higher occurrence (61.31%) within profiles with posts in disagreement with CDE, similar to findings of other studies^{8,13}.

In this regard, it is important to highlight Resolution 196/2019¹⁴, published by the Federal Council of Dentistry (CFO), which deals with the dissemination of selfies and images of procedures, being authorized provided that the Free and Clear Consent Form has been signed (FCCF). However, expressions aimed at professional self-promotion, promise of results, or that cause Dentistry commodification, continue to be a violation of ethical aspects^{9,14}, corroborating items V, VI and XII of CDE article 44¹¹, and also contrary to Law No. 5.081/1966¹⁵. Thus, such resolution disregards provisions present in Law No. 5.081/1966¹⁵ and in CDE¹¹, since it facilitates the break of professional secrecy unjustifiably, which may cause embarrassment to the patient¹⁶. It is important to clarify that such resolution is an administrative norm, being limited to the internal scope of Dentistry.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that the Federal Constitution¹⁷, in its article 5, brings the right to privacy, saying that “the intimacy, private life, honor and image of people are inviolable, ensuring the right to compensation for material or moral damage resulting from their violation”. Article 20 of the Civil Code¹⁸ says that a person can prohibit the use of his/her image if it affects his/her honor or if they are intended for commercial purposes. In addition, in its article 14, CDE¹¹ refers to professional secrecy, being an ethical infraction to display elements that can identify the patient in any way, being allowed only if the professional is using it for teaching purposes and with previous signature of the FCCF by the patient. In this sense, the Penal Code¹⁹ deals with crime of violation of professional secrecy (article 154), when the disclosure of this secrecy, without just cause, causes harm to someone. Therefore, the professional who chooses to expose images needs to be aware that he/she may be liable in the administrative, civil and criminal spheres^{6,8,20}.

Still regarding the exposure of the patient, in the present study, it was verified that 43.07% of profiles in disagreement with CDE disclosed name, address and other elements that identify the patient. It is up to the professional to consider the CDE as a normative document, keeping in mind that the authorization of the patient or his/her legal guardian allows the dentist to display an image with educational-academic purposes only^{11,20}.

Disclosure of transoperative care was found in 16.79% of profiles, a result similar to that found in a study carried out in 2013¹³. However, it was observed that such an act is an ethical infraction and can even be characterized as manifest gravity^{11,14}. Another theme addressed was the exposure of biological and/or instrumental materials, being present in 10.22% of profiles, which is considered an ethical infraction¹⁴. Another point that should be highlighted is that most of photos posted by dentists are taken inside the dental office, and not committing an ethical infraction by exposing instruments or dental equipment is practically impossible.

In this study, disclosure of consultation, diagnosis or clinical results was observed in 4.38% of profiles; another study¹⁶ obtained more expressive result, present in 13.5% of profiles. CDE¹¹ allows such situations exclusively for clarification and education of the community, talking about the topic in general without self-promotion; therefore, its performance outside this context constitutes an ethical infraction. However, it must be kept in mind that dental information via the Internet should aim to complement, and never replace, the personal relationship that should exist between patient and dentist.

Enticing patients by means of false, illicit information or advertising, with the aim of attracting customers, is considered an ethical infraction¹¹; in addition, it goes against the Consumer Protection Code^{5,6,8,21}, which in its article 37, prohibits all misleading or abusive advertising. Paragraph 1 of that article considers information capable of misleading the consumer regarding any data about products or services to be misleading²¹. In the present study, 3.65% of evaluated profiles contained such publication, which is similar to a previous study²². It is noteworthy that advertising can configure a contract between parties, causing the dentist to be responsible for the result, since the patient may interpret that the procedure will be the same as what was exposed^{6,8}.

Law 5.081/1966¹⁵, which regulates the practice of dentistry, lists some prohibitions on dentists, including free service, disclosure of prices and payment methods. In order to corroborate the legislation, CDE¹¹ characterizes such conduct as ethical infractions. One justification for prohibiting free services is that it can devalue the profession, in addition to being interpreted as lack of professional responsibility towards society⁶. In the present study, no ethical violations on this topic were found, results similar to a previous study carried out in 2013¹³. However, in 2015¹², a study found that 19.26% of profiles displayed advertisements for service prices and payment methods. In 2016⁸, a study observed that of analyzed profiles, 2.33% displayed price, 5.44% displayed payment method, and 2.72% offered free services.

It was found in this research that 64.31% of profiles were in disagreement with CDE¹¹, infringing one or more of its items. In this scenario, there is a need to raise awareness among these dentists regarding the disclosure of their services in an ethical manner.

The items analyzed in this study do not concern only ethical issues, and the professional may be subject to civil and criminal liability. In cases of ethical infraction, an ethical process will be opened by the Regional Council of Dentistry, assessing the severity by the extent of the damage and its consequences to estimate the penalties and fines that may be applied¹¹. In other spheres, the professional may respond to legal proceedings. It was then observed that the professional may have complications other than just administrative ones.

Knowledge of regulations related to professional performance is essential for the dentist to provide ethical and legal care to patients within the rights and duties of each one²³⁻²⁵. Thus, a qualified professional, with legal and dental knowledge such as a Forensic Dentistry professional, would be the ideal teacher to seek to correlate practical and clinical activities with theory, supporting and consolidating knowledge for students^{26,27}. Considering the importance of the subject for clinical practice, there are guidelines that suggest a better way of working with Forensic Dentistry and Deontology and Diceology contents. However, studies have shown that these guidelines are not always used, varying the number of hours and content covered in these guidelines^{23,25,28}.

It is essential that professionals have common sense and be careful when using social networks to publish advertisements, keeping informed and following the precepts of CDE¹¹. Another important aspect is the fact that the professional claiming ignorance of laws and resolutions to justify infractions does not exempt him/her from suffering foreseen penalties¹¹, since these are legislation and norms that deal with the regulation of his/her profession.

CONCLUSION

Most of analyzed profiles (64.31%) of DEs from Londrina are in disagreement with CDE, referring to the ethical aspects of advertising and publicity. The disclosure of “before and after” images was the most frequently found item, being present in 61.31% of profiles that showed disagreement with CDE.

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