

Dentists Go On Vacations; Emergencies Don't

Recently, I had a patient come in to my office for a dental emergency who was a regular patient of one of my colleagues. The patient was very upset because she felt her dentist had forgotten about her, and she was concerned that he did not want to continue to be her dentist. After managing her dental emergency, I reassured her that her regular dentist was only away temporarily and that she should call his office to schedule a follow-up appointment when the dentist returned in a few weeks. More than likely, this incident was simply an example of miscommunication; however, there were no clear arrangements for emergency management of which the patient was aware.

One of the benefits of receiving regular care from a reputable dentist is that he or she will likely make arrangements for coverage of emergencies when the dentist is away for patients of record. In fact, the Principles of Ethics



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and Code of Professional Conduct published by the American Dental Association with which most dentists aspire to comply clearly states,

“Dentists shall be obliged to make reasonable arrangements for the emergency care of their patients of record.”(Section 4.B)

Most of the time, dentists will make arrangements with specific colleagues for emergency coverage. In group practices, this may be within the same practice, but it may also be a particular specialist or another dentist in the community to whom emergencies will be referred while the regular dentist is out of town. An agreement to manage emergencies among dentists, however, does not imply that fees for services will or will not be

charged similarly to that of the regular dentist. Emergencies are, by definition, an inconvenience for both the patient and the providing dentist, and they are usually billed accordingly. Because arrangements are usually made for emergency coverage based on mutual respect and understanding of practice philosophy between dentists, it is best to seek emergency care from the dentist who the dentist of record recommends and then to schedule a follow-up visit with the regular dentist as soon as he or she becomes available.

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For questions about dental health or to schedule a complementary consultation, call 330-364-2011, visit www.doctorhuff.net, or ask your regular dentist.