



IDPH News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

1-7-11

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Dental Board Statement about Corporate Dentistry and Allcare Dental Closure

The sudden closure of Allcare Dental, a corporate dental practice with offices in Des Moines, Iowa has left many patients unsure about their continued dental care. The Iowa Dental Board, the state board that oversees the licensing and regulation of the dental profession, has been advised by the Iowa-licensed dentists formerly employed by Allcare that they are now working to provide for a smooth transition of patient records and care. The Board office has received a call from Emergency Dental Care USA in Clive, Iowa who advised that they have reached an agreement with Allcare Dental to accept the transfer of patient records. A news release from Emergency Dental Care that provides more details and information for patients is now available on their website at www.desmoinesemergencydental.com/desmoines-allcare.html.

Under current law, the Iowa Dental Board licenses only dentists, not business corporations. The Board holds all Iowa-licensed dentists responsible for maintaining patient records and ensuring there is no abandonment of patient care. Working for a corporate dental practice does not relieve a licensed dentist of responsibility for complying with the standards of patient care and principles of professional ethics established by the Board.

“Corporate dentistry” refers to an emerging business model where a corporation runs the business side of a practice and hires licensed dentists as employees. The Board has observed that this model tends to attract younger dentists who are newer to the practice of dentistry and not as familiar with the corporate practice structure. The Board’s compliance staff has made it a regular part of their presentations to dental school classes to remind them that as a licensee they, not the corporation, are accountable for meeting Board requirements. Such employment relationships can be very challenging as often the employed dentist may not have access to the patient records, the financial documents, or even the office after business hours.

In many other states, the dental board has statutory or administrative authority to regulate both the corporate practice and the dentists. Since early 2010, the Board has been gathering information about other states' experiences in this area. Board Chair, Dr. Gary Roth, D.D.S. said "With no direct control over the business practices of the corporation it can be very difficult for a licensed dentist to meet the Board's requirements. Currently we license the dentist, not the business. We will continue to look as this issue to determine if rule or statutory changes should be proposed to protect Iowans."

The Board has seen an increase in complaints in connection with corporate dental practices. The types of complaints include both continuity of care issues and issues related to the business aspects of the practice. Often the employed dentists are not aware that they are still fully responsible. "When we see a series of complaints that suggest a trend, the Board takes necessary steps to fix the problem," Roth said. "For example, the Board adopted rule amendments in October, 2010 to address inappropriate patient billing practices. Under these new rules, a dentist is not allowed to pre-bill a patient for services not yet received. However, remember that these rules apply only to the licensed dentist, not the corporation that is running the dental business."

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