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How the Dental Peer Review System works with Appropriate Issues for Peer Review

Appropriate issues for peer review are quality of care or appropriateness of care. Quality of care refers to the skill with which a treatment is provided, using the standards which generally prevail within the professional community. Appropriateness of care refers to the professional acceptability of planned or completed treatments, to include necessity and consistency with diagnosis. In evaluating the appropriateness and quality of care, the peer review committee members use their own clinical experience and consider the patient's oral history, existing medical conditions and the complexity of the case and treatment. The committee may also use quality of care guidelines in deciding on questions of quality and appropriateness of care, but committee members also consider individual patient circumstances that may require deviation from guidelines.

The more time that elapses between the disputed treatment and its presentation to the peer review committee, the greater the possibility that the clinical condition which was the focus of the patient's complaint may be affected by changes in the patient's health status, subsequent treatment the patient may have had, or simply the passing of time. For this reason, peer review programs usually define a specific, limited time frame within which a case can be brought to peer review. Therefore, it is advisable that disputes be brought to the peer review committee as soon as possible after the patient or dentist recognizes the problem. State statutes of limitations are used as a guide for setting the time frame.

Note: In Mississippi, complaints that reflect one year or longer from the completion of the dental treatment are considered inappropriate for the peer review process.

Peer review committees do not accept cases that are in litigation or in which the dentist has reported the case to a collection agency. Peer review is not intended as a court of law and does not use the same rules and procedures as a court of law. For example, peer review committees request both parties in the dispute to provide the committee with relevant information to the case. The committee uses the information in its decision making, but holds the information in confidence. It does not share information provided by party A, with party B, and vice versa. The peer review process focuses directly on the issue at hand and is accomplished through straightforward procedures and reasoning that are immediately understandable by the layperson. It is intended to offer both parties an opportunity to settle the dispute expeditiously, at little or no financial cost.

Peer review committees do not accept cases that may involve alleged fraud or violation of the Mississippi Dental Practice Act.