

# Guideline on Record-keeping

## Review Council

Council on Clinical Affairs

## Latest Revision

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### Purpose

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry (AAPD) recognizes the patient record is an essential component of the delivery of competent and quality oral health care. It serves as an information source for the care provider and patient, as well as any authorized third party. This guideline will assist the practitioner in assimilating and maintaining a comprehensive, uniform, and organized record addressing patient care. However, it is not intended to create a standard of care.

### Methods

This guideline was originally developed by the Council on Clinical Affairs and adopted in 2004. This document is a revision of the previous version, last revised in 2007. This revision included a new systematic literature search of the MEDLINE/PubMed® electronic database using the terms: dental record, electronic patient record, problem-oriented dental record, medical history taking, medical record, record keeping, and HIPAA; fields: all; limits: within the last 10 years, humans, and English. Four hundred ninety five articles matched these criteria. Papers for review were chosen from this list and from the references within selected articles and dental textbooks. When data did not appear sufficient or were inconclusive, recommendations were based upon expert and/or consensus opinion by experienced researchers and clinicians.

### Background

The patient record provides all privileged parties with the history and details of patient assessment and communications between dentist and patient, as well as specific treatment recommendations, alternatives, risks, and care provided. The patient record is an important legal document in third party relationships. Poor or inadequate documentation of patient care consistently is reported as a major contributing factor in unfavorable legal judgments against dentists.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the AAPD recognizes that a guideline on record-keeping may provide dentists the information needed to compile an accurate and complete patient chart that can be interpreted by a knowledgeable third party.

An electronic patient record is becoming more commonplace, and perhaps will become mandatory.<sup>1-3</sup> Advantages include quality assurance by allowing comparative analysis of groups of patients or providers, medical and dental history

profiles for demographic data, support for decision making based on signs and symptoms, administrative management for patient education and recall, and electronic data interchange with other professional and third parties. The software must contain all the essential elements of a traditional paper record.

The elements of record-keeping addressed in this guideline are general charting considerations; initial patient record; components of a patient record; patient medical and dental histories; comprehensive and limited clinical examinations; treatment planning and informed consent; progress notes; correspondence, consultations, and ancillary documents; and confidential notes. Additionally, appendices to this guideline illustrate items for consideration in the development of patient medical and dental histories and examination forms. These lists, developed by experts in pediatric dentistry and offered to facilitate excellence in practice, should be modified as needed by individual practitioners. These samples do not establish or evidence a standard of care. In issuing this information, the AAPD is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional advice. If such services are required, competent legal or other professional counsel should be sought.

### Recommendations

#### General charting considerations

The dental record must be authentic, accurate, legible, and objective. Each patient should have an individual dental record. Chart entries should contain the initials or name of the individual making the note. Abbreviations should be standardized for the practice. Risk management experts recommend a problem-oriented record.<sup>4</sup> After data collection, a list is compiled that includes medical considerations, psychological/behavior constraints, and the oral health needs to be addressed. Problems are listed in order of importance in a standardized fashion making it less likely that an area might be overlooked. The plan identifies a general course of treatment for each problem. This plan can result in the need for additional information, consultation with other practitioners, patient education, and preventive strategies.

#### Initial patient record

The parent's/patient's initial contact with the dental practice, usually via telephone, allows both parties an opportunity to address the patient's primary oral health needs and to confirm

the appropriateness of scheduling an appointment with that particular practitioner. During this conversation, the receptionist may record basic patient information such as:

- Patient's name, nickname, and date of birth.
- Name, address, and telephone number of parent.
- Name of referring party.
- Significant medical history.
- Chief complaint.

Such information constitutes the initial dental record. At the first visit to the dental office, additional information would be obtained and a permanent dental record developed.

### Components of a patient record

The dental record must include each of the following specific components:

- Medical history.
- Dental history.
- Clinical assessment.
- Diagnosis.
- Treatment recommendations.
- Progress notes.
- Acknowledgment of receipt of Notice of Privacy Practices/Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) consent.<sup>5</sup>

When applicable, the following should be incorporated into the patient's record as well:

- Radiographic assessment.
- Caries risk assessment.
- Informed consent documentation.
- Sedation/general anesthesia records.
- Trauma records.
- Orthodontic records.
- Consultations/referrals.
- Laboratory orders.
- Test results.
- Additional ancillary records.

### Medical history<sup>6-8</sup>

An accurate, comprehensive, and up-to-date medical history is necessary for correct diagnosis and effective treatment planning. Familiarity with the patient's medical history is essential to decreasing the risk of aggravating a medical condition while rendering dental care. Additionally, a thorough history can aid the diagnosis of dental as well as medical conditions. The practitioner, or staff under the supervision of the practitioner, must obtain a medical history from the parent (if the patient is under the age of 18) before commencing patient care. When the parent cannot provide adequate details regarding a patient's medical history, or if the dentist providing care is unfamiliar with the patient's medical diagnosis, consultation with the medical health care provider may be indicated.

Documentation of the patient's medical history includes the following elements of information, with elaboration of positive findings:

- Medical conditions and/or illnesses.
- Name and, if available, telephone number of primary and specialty medical care providers.
- Hospitalizations/surgeries.
- Anesthetic experiences.
- Current medications.
- Allergies/reactions to medications.
- Other allergies/sensitivities.
- Immunization status.
- Review of systems.
- Family history.
- Social history.

Appendix I provides suggestions for specific information that may be included in the written medical questionnaire or during discussions with the patient/parent. The history form should provide the parent/legal guardian additional space for information regarding positive historical findings, as well any medical conditions not listed. There should be areas on the form indicating the date of completion, the signature of the person providing the history (along with his/her relationship to the patient), and the signature of the staff member reviewing the history with the parent/legal guardian. Records of patients with significant medical conditions should be marked Medical Alert in a conspicuous yet confidential manner.

### Medical history for adolescents<sup>9</sup>

The adolescent can present particular psychosocial characteristics that impact the health status of the oral cavity, care seeking, and compliance. Integrating positive youth development<sup>8</sup> into the practice, the practitioner should obtain additional information confidentially from teenagers. Topics to be discussed may include nutritional and dietary considerations, eating disorders, alcohol and substance abuse, tobacco usage, over-the-counter medications and supplements, body art (e.g., intra- and extraoral piercings, tattoos), and pregnancy.

### Medical update

At each patient visit, the history should be consulted and updated. Recent medical attention for illness or injury, newly diagnosed medical conditions, and changes in medications should be documented. A written update should be obtained at each recall visit.

### Dental history<sup>6,8,10,11</sup>

A thorough dental history is essential to guide the practitioner's clinical assessment, make an accurate diagnosis, and develop a comprehensive preventive and therapeutic program for each patient. The dental history should address the following:

- Chief complaint.
- Previous dental experience.
- Date of last dental visit/radiographs.

- Oral hygiene practices.
- Fluoride use/exposure history.
- Dietary habits (including bottle/no-spill training cup use in young children).
- Oral habits.
- Sports activities.
- Previous orofacial trauma.
- Temporomandibular joint (TMJ) history.
- Family history of caries.
- Social development.

Appendix II provides suggestions for specific information that may be included in the written dental questionnaire or during discussions with the patient/parent.

### **Comprehensive clinical examination**<sup>7,8,12</sup>

The clinical examination is tailored to the patient's chief complaint (e.g., initial visit to establish a dental home, acute traumatic injury, second opinion). A visual examination should precede other diagnostic procedures. Components of a comprehensive oral examination include:

- General health/growth assessment.
- Pain assessment.
- Extraoral soft tissue examination.
- TMJ assessment.
- Intraoral soft tissue examination.
- Oral hygiene and periodontal health assessment.
- Assessment of the developing occlusion.
- Intraoral hard tissue examination.
- Radiographic assessment, if indicated.<sup>13</sup>
- Caries risk assessment.<sup>14</sup>
- Assessed behavior of child.<sup>15</sup>

Appendix III provides suggestions for specific information that may be included in the oral examination.

The dentist may employ additional diagnostic tools to complete the oral health assessment. Such diagnostic aids may include electric or thermal pulp testing, photographs, laboratory tests, and study casts. If the child is old enough to talk, the speech may be evaluated and provide additional diagnostic information.

### **Examinations of a limited nature**

If a patient is seen for limited care, a consultation, an emergency, or a second opinion, a medical and dental history must be obtained, along with a hard and soft tissue examination as deemed necessary by the practitioner. The parent should be informed of the limited nature of the treatment and counseled to seek routine comprehensive care. The AAPD's Guideline on Management of Acute Dental Trauma<sup>16</sup> and Assessment of Acute Traumatic Injuries<sup>17</sup> provides greater details on diagnostic procedures and documentation for this clinical circumstance.

### **Treatment recommendations and informed consent**

Once the clinician has obtained the medical and dental histories and evaluated the facts obtained during the diagnostic procedures, the diagnoses should be derived and a sequential

prioritized treatment plan developed. The treatment plan would include specific information regarding the nature of the procedures/materials to be used, number of appointments/time frame needed to accomplish this care, behavior guidance techniques, and fee for proposed procedures. The dentist is obligated to educate the parent on the need for and benefits of the recommended care, as well as risks, alternatives, and expectations if no intervention is provided. When deemed appropriate, the patient should be included in these discussions. The dentist should not attempt to decide what the parent will accept or can afford. After the treatment plan is presented, the parent should have the opportunity to ask questions regarding the proposed care and have concerns satisfied prior to giving informed consent. Documentation should include that the parent appeared to understand and accepted the proposed procedures. Any special restrictions of the parent should be documented.

### **Progress notes**

An entry must be made in the patient's record that accurately and objectively summarizes each visit. The entry must minimally contain the following information:

- Date of visit.
- Reason for visit/chief complaint.
- Radiographic exposures and interpretation, if any.
- Treatment rendered including, but not limited to, the type and dosage of anesthetic agents<sup>18</sup>, medications, and/or nitrous oxide/oxygen<sup>19</sup> and type/duration of protective stabilization<sup>15</sup>.
- Post-operative instructions and prescriptions as needed.

In addition, the entry generally should document:

- Changes in the medical history, if any.
- Adult accompanying child.
- Verification of compliance with preoperative instructions.
- Reference to supplemental documents.
- Patient behavior guidance.
- Anticipated follow-up visit.

A standardized format may provide the practitioner a way to record the essential aspects of care on a consistent basis. One example of documentation is the SOAP note.<sup>20</sup> SOAP is an acronym for subjective (S) or the patient's response and feeling to treatment, objective (O) or the observations of the clinician, assessment (A) or diagnosis of the problem, and procedures accomplished and plans (P) for subsequent problem resolving activities. The signature or initials of the office staff member documenting the visit should be entered.

When sedation or general anesthesia is employed, additional documentation on a time-based record is required, as discussed in the AAPD's Guideline for Monitoring and Management of Pediatric Patients During and After Sedation for Diagnostic and Therapeutic Procedures.<sup>21</sup>

Progress notes also should include telephone conversations regarding the patient’s care, appointment history (i.e., cancellations, failures, tardiness), non-compliance with treatment recommendations, and educational materials utilized (both video and written), along with identification of the staff member making the entry in the dental record.

**Orthodontic treatment**

The AAPD’s Guideline on Management of the Developing Dentition and Occlusion in Pediatric Dentistry<sup>22</sup> provides general recommendations on the documentation of orthodontic care. Signs and/or symptoms of TMJ disorders should be recorded when they occur before, during, or after orthodontic treatment.<sup>23</sup> During orthodontic treatment, progress notes should include deficiencies in oral hygiene, loose bands and brackets, patient complaints, caries, root resorption, and cancellations and failures.

**Correspondence, consultations, and ancillary documents**

The primary care dentist often consults with other health care providers in the course of delivery of comprehensive oral health care, especially for patients with special health care needs or complex oral conditions. Communications with medical care providers or dental specialists should be incorporated into the dental record. Written referrals to other care providers should include the specific nature of the referral, as well as pertinent patient history and clinical findings. A progress note should be made on correspondence sent or received regarding a referral, indicating documentation filed elsewhere in the patient’s chart. Copies of test results, prescriptions, laboratory work orders, and other ancillary documents should be maintained as part of the dental record.

**Appendices\***

\*The information included in the following samples, developed by the AAPD, is provided as a tool for pediatric dentists and other dentists treating children. It was developed by experts in pediatric dentistry and is offered to facilitate excellence in practice. However, these samples do not establish or evidence a standard of care. In issuing this information, the AAPD is not engaged in rendering legal or other professional advice. If such services are required, competent legal or other professional counsel should be sought.

**Appendix I—Medical history\***

- Name and nickname
- Date of birth
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Height, weight by report
- Name, address, and telephone number of all physicians
- Date of last physical examination
- Immunization status
- Summary of health problems

- Any health conditions that necessitate antibiotics or other medications prior to dental treatment
- Allergies/sensitivities/reactions
  - Anesthetics, local and general
  - Sedative agents
  - Drugs or medications
  - Environmental (including latex, food, dyes, metal, acrylic)
- Medications (including over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and herbal supplements)—dose, frequency, reactions
- Hospitalizations—reason, date, and outcome
- Surgeries—reason, date, and outcome
- Significant injuries—description, date, and outcome
- General
  - Complications during pregnancy and/or birth
  - Prematurity
  - Congenital anomalies
  - Cleft lip/palate
  - Inherited disorders
  - Nutritional deficiencies
  - Problems of growth or stature
- Head, ears, eyes, nose, throat
  - Lesions in/around mouth
  - Chronic adenoid/tonsil infections
  - Chronic ear infections
  - Ear problems
  - Hearing impairments
  - Eye problems
  - Visual impairments
  - Sinusitis
  - Speech impairments
  - Apnea/snoring
  - Mouth breathing
- Cardiovascular
  - Congenital heart defect/disease
  - Heart murmur
  - High blood pressure
  - Rheumatic fever
  - Rheumatic heart disease
- Respiratory
  - Asthma—medications, triggers, last attack, hospitalizations
  - Tuberculosis
  - Cystic fibrosis
  - Frequent colds/coughs
  - Respiratory syncytial virus
  - Reactive airway disease/breathing problems
  - Smoking
- Gastrointestinal
  - Eating disorder

Ulcer	Endocrine
Excessive gagging	Diabetes
Gastroesophageal/acid reflux disease	Growth delays
Hepatitis	Hormonal problems
Jaundice	Precocious puberty
Liver disease	Thyroid problems
Intestinal problems	Hematologic/lymphatic/immunologic
Prolonged diarrhea	Anemia
Unintentional weight loss	Blood disorder
Lactose intolerance	Transfusion
Dietary restrictions	Excessive bleeding
Genitourinary	Bruising easily
Bladder infections	Hemophilia
Kidney infections	Sickle cell disease/trait
Pregnancy	Cancer, tumor, other malignancy
Systemic birth control	Immune disorder
Sexually transmitted diseases	Chemotherapy
Musculoskeletal	Radiation therapy
Arthritis	Hematopoietic cell (bone marrow) transplant
Scoliosis	Infectious disease
Bone/joint problems	Measles
TMJ problems—popping, clicking, locking, difficulties opening or chewing	Mumps
Integumentary	Rubella
Herpetic/ulcerative lesions	Scarlet fever
Eczema	Varicella (chicken pox)
Rash/hives	Mononucleosis
Dermatologic conditions	Cytomegalovirus (CMV)
Neurologic	Pertussis (whooping cough)
Fainting	Human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS)
Dizziness	Family history
Autism	Genetic disorders
Developmental disorders	Problems with general anesthesia
Learning problems/delays	Serious medical conditions or illnesses
Mental disability	Social concerns
Brain injury	Passive smoke exposure
Cerebral palsy	Religious or philosophical objections to treatment
Convulsions/seizures	
Epilepsy	
Headaches/migraines	
Hydrocephaly	
Shunts—ventriculoperitoneal, ventriculoatrial, ventriculovenous	
Psychiatric	
Abuse	
Alcohol and chemical dependency	
Emotional disturbance	
Hyperactivity/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder	
Psychiatric problems/treatment	

## Appendix II—Dental History\*

- Previous dentist, address, telephone number
- Family dentist
- Date of last visit
- Date of last dental radiographs, number and type taken, if known
- Prenatal/natal history
- Family history of caries, including parents and siblings
- History of smoking in the home
- Medications or disorders that would impair salivary flow
- Injuries to teeth and jaws, including TMJ trauma
  - When
  - Treatment required
- Dental pain and infections
- Habits (past and present) such as finger, thumb, pacifier, tongue or lip sucking, bruxism, clenching
- Snoring
- Diet and dietary habits
  - Breast feeding—frequency, weaned/when
  - Bottle feeding/no-spill training (sippy) cup use
    - Frequency
    - Content—Formula, milk water, juice
    - Weaned/when
  - Sodas, fruit juice, sports drinks, beverages—amount, frequency
  - Snacks—type, frequency
  - Meals—balanced
- Oral hygiene
  - Frequency of brushing, flossing
  - Assisted/supervised
- Fluoride exposure
  - Primary source of drinking water—home, daycare, other
  - Water—tap, bottled, well, filtered/reverse osmosis
  - Systemic supplementation—tablets, drops
  - Topical—toothpaste, rinses, prescription
- Previous orthodontic treatment
- Behavior of child during past dental treatment
- Behavior anticipated for future treatment

## Appendix III—Clinical Examination\*

- General health/growth assessment
  - Growth appropriate for age
  - Height/weight/frame size/body mass index (BMI)
  - Vital signs—pulse, blood pressure
- Extraoral examination
  - Facial features
  - Nasal breathing
  - Lip posture
  - Symmetry
  - Pathologies
  - Skin health
- Temporomandibular joint/disorder (TMJ/TMD)<sup>12</sup>
  - Signs of clenching/bruxism
  - Headaches from TMD
  - Pain
  - Joint sounds
  - Limitations or disturbance of movement or function
- Intra-oral soft tissue examination
  - Tongue
  - Roof of mouth
  - Frenulae
  - Floor of mouth
  - Tonsils/pharynx
  - Lips
  - Pathologies noted
- Oral hygiene and periodontal assessment<sup>24,25</sup>
  - Oral hygiene, including an index or score
  - Gingival health, including an index or score
  - Probing of pocket depth, when indicated
  - Marginal discrepancies
  - Calculus
  - Bone level discrepancies that are pathologic
  - Recession/inadequate attached gingiva
  - Mobility
  - Bleeding/suppuration
  - Furcation involvement
- Assessment of the developing occlusion
  - Facial profile
  - Canine relationships
  - Molar relationships
  - Overjet
  - Overbite Midline
  - Crossbite
  - Alignment
  - Spacing/crowding
  - Centric relation/centric occlusion discrepancy
  - Influence of oral habits
  - Appliances present

## Intraoral hard tissue examination

Teeth present  
 Supernumerary/missing teeth  
 Dental development status  
 Over-retained primary teeth  
 Ankylosed teeth  
 Ectopic eruption  
 Anomalies/pathologies noted  
 Tooth size, shape discrepancies  
 Tooth discoloration  
 Enamel hypoplasia  
 Congenital defects  
 Existing restorations  
 Defective restorations  
 Caries  
 Pulpal pathology<sup>26</sup>  
 Traumatic injuries  
 Third molars

Radiographic examination<sup>27</sup>

Developmental anomalies  
 Eruptive patterns/tooth positions/root resorption  
 Crestal alveolar bone level  
 Pulpal/furcation/periapical pathology  
 Caries—presence, proximity to pulp space,  
 demineralization/remineralization  
 Existing pulpal therapy/restorations  
 Traumatic injury  
 Calculus deposits  
 Occult disease  
 Explanation of inability to obtain diagnostic image  
 when indicated

Caries-risk assessment<sup>14</sup>

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