

GDC Press Release

26 October 2006

Dental regulator clamps down on unlicensed operators

The General Dental Council (GDC) has today (26 October 2006) challenged in court for the first time the practice of non-dentists offering tooth-whitening treatments.

The GDC brought a case of alleged "illegal practice of dentistry" against Ben Nahab, who pleaded guilty. He had performed a tooth whitening procedure on 18 May 2006.

Mr Nahab was convicted, and ordered to pay a fine plus costs and compensation.

The case was heard at Norwich Magistrates Court.

The GDC is seeking a landmark ruling so that it can stamp out the practice by non-dentists.

Dental professionals have contacted the GDC expressing concerns about the safety of non-dentists offering such a service.

GDC President Hew Mathewson said:

"The General Dental Council's priority is to protect the public. Tooth whitening can be dangerous, particularly in the hands of unregistered professionals.

"We believe that, for public safety, only registered dentists should be permitted to carry out tooth whitening procedures or provide clinical advice about such treatments.

"We are committed to protecting the public by bringing cases of illegal practice of dentistry to court. If we receive information that suggests an unregistered person may be practising dentistry illegally, we will investigate."

Ends

For media enquiries, please contact Alexander Wells on 020 7009 2746.

Notes to Editors

1. The General Dental Council is the organisation which regulates dental professionals in the UK. All dentists, dental hygienists, dental therapists, clinical dental technicians and orthodontic therapists must be registered with the GDC to work in the UK - whether they work in the NHS, private practice or any other form of practice. From 31 July 2008 all dental nurses and dental technicians must be registered with the GDC to work in the UK.

The GDC's purpose is to protect patients by:

- registering qualified dental professionals,
- setting high standards of dental practice and behaviour,
- quality-assuring dental education,
- making sure dental professionals keep up to date,
- helping people who want to make a complaint about a dental professional, and
- taking action if a dental professional is no longer safe to practise.

More information about all areas of the GDC's work is available from www.gdc-uk.org

2. It is a criminal offence under section 38 of the Dentists Act 1984 (as amended) for anyone other than a GDC registrant (or, in limited circumstances, someone registered with another regulatory body) to practise dentistry. The GDC considers that the practice of dentistry includes any dental work carried out inside a person's mouth.
3. The penalty for the illegal practice of dentistry is a fine. In practice, the GDC relies on information from others regarding illegal practice taking place. The GDC needs evidence of an offence before it can proceed with a prosecution. In cases such as this, the GDC asks its solicitors to investigate. After making every effort to obtain sufficient evidence, the case proceeds to the local Magistrates Court.
4. Since 1992 tooth whitening products have been classified as cosmetic products in European directives. New legislation is expected in the near future that could increase the range of tooth whitening products available to consumers over the counter. In addition, the regulation of tooth whitening products containing more than six per cent hydrogen peroxide is being considered by the European Commission.