

## Implied Expertise

It is often difficult for patients to distinguish between advertising claims and factual information, particularly when marketing experts are able to create a message that is very appealing to consumers. For instance, there are numerous dentists advertising that they have advanced credentials suggesting a certain level of specialized expertise with dental implant treatment. These claims are questionable at best and it is important to keep in mind that advertising is used to sell something, in this case dental implant treatment.

### *CDA-Recognized Specialties*

These so-called “credentials” in implant dentistry are not recognized by the Canadian Dental Association (CDA) and in fact, implant dentistry is not a recognized specialty. However, thousands of dentists have taken abbreviated training courses in implant dentistry and then portray themselves as specialists in this field. There are only nine specialties recognized by the CDA, all of which require post-graduate residency training following dental school. A list of these specialties and the descriptions, or definitions, of each can be found on the CDA website. Click here for [https://www.cda-adc.ca/en/oral\\_health/specialties/](https://www.cda-adc.ca/en/oral_health/specialties/) descriptions.

### *Fellowship in Implant Organizations*

Some dentists indicate that they are a “Fellow” of a particular implant organization, such as Fellow of the International Congress of Oral Implantologists and Fellow of the American Dental Implant Association. This designation is provided when dentists attend continuing education course or submit cases for review. Both of these organizations offer Diplomate status, which should not be confused with the Diplomate status, or board certification, that CDA-recognized specialists achieve with additional rigorous study and examination. Further, Fellow and Diplomate status in these organizations does not indicate that the dentist is a specialist, nor is this an indication of competency.

There is a new organization, launched in 2015, the American Society of Implant and Reconstructive Dentistry. The organization offers membership levels to general dentists that refer implant patients to the sponsoring surgeons. The various membership designations can be confusing for patients, since they are based primarily on the dentists’ participation in continuing education courses provided by the sponsoring surgeon, as well as the number of dental implant patients referred to that surgeon. Additionally, some dentists appear to have more experience than others, based simply on the fact that they do not refer as many patients to the sponsoring surgeon as other dentists with higher-level membership distinction.

### *Training Institutes Offering Certification*

There are a number of training “institutes” that offer a variety of courses for general dentists that want to surgically place dental implants. Some of the programs are abbreviated (1-3 days) and others have multiple sessions over the course of a year or more. Many of these courses provide a certificate for participants upon completion, which are often used to imply a certain level of competency. These certificates are not recognized by the Canadian Dental Association, or any Provincial Licensing Body. There is even one institute in California that is now offering a “Master of Implantology” which is not the same as an actual master’s degree from an accredited university school of dentistry. As such, it is extremely important for patients to ask questions about training, credentials, and experience.

### *RCDSO Code of Ethics and Unrecognized "Credentials"*

The Royal College of Dentist of Ontario website provides the Code of Ethics that member dentists are supposed to follow, although unfortunately, they do not always comply. Click Here for <https://www.rcdso.org/en-ca/rcdso-members/your-responsibilities/code-of-ethics>

According to the RCDSO Code of Ethics, regarding professional announcement, "Never overstate or embellish qualifications, including advertising or speech, that could mislead a reasonable person." Regarding advertising, the RCDSO Practice Guideline states, "Do not include in your advertisement materials anything that would be considered by the College to be in violation of the advertising regulation."

This includes using:

- reference to your continuing education, or membership or positions at the College or in societies, associations, academies or similar institutions.
- reference to any degrees or diplomas other than those relating to the degrees or diplomas required for you to obtain a certificate of registration from this College
- testimonials or any statement that can only be verified by a person's personal feelings or views

"The announcement of an unearned academic degree may be misleading because of the likelihood that it will indicate to the public the attainment of specialty or diplomate status." Yet unfortunately, many dentists continue to imply through their advertising that they have expertise, advanced credentials, and extensive experience in implant dentistry, which is misleading for patients.