

**Root canal performed on wrong tooth
18HDC01472, 21 June 2019**

Dentist ~Dental service ~Root canal ~ Wrong tooth ~Right 4(1)

A woman attended an appointment at a dental service for treatment of inflamed gums, pus between her lower two front teeth, and pain. A dentist performed an assessment and undertook various tests. Based on the results and her presenting symptoms, he diagnosed a non-vital tooth 41 with chronic periapical periodontitis and concurrent acute infection. The dentist presented the options of either root canal treatment or extraction, and the woman decided to proceed with root canal treatment, and an appointment was booked.

At the appointment, in error, the dentist isolated tooth 31 instead of tooth 41. He therefore performed the root canal treatment on tooth 31, rather than tooth 41.

Upon opening the tooth, there was no pus or blood draining from the root canal, indicating that the nerve within the tooth was non-vital. The dentist completed this stage of the root canal treatment, and scheduled an appointment for the next stage.

The dentist said that when reviewing the radiographs and writing his notes once the woman had left the room, he noticed that he had initiated the root canal treatment on tooth 31 rather than tooth 41. The woman was still at reception, so he took her to a surgery room. He immediately informed her of the error, apologised, and advised her that regrettably tooth 41 still required treatment based on the original diagnosis.

Subsequently, the woman was referred to a specialist endodontist, arranged by the dentist upon the woman's request, and the root canal treatment on tooth 31 was completed. The woman's symptoms resolved, and tooth 41 did not require further treatment at that time.

Findings

It was held that the dentist failed to isolate the correct tooth for operation, and therefore performed the root canal treatment on the incorrect tooth. Accordingly, he failed to provide services with reasonable care and skill, and breached Right 4(1) of the Code. The dental service was not found in breach of the Code.

Recommendations

It was recommended that the dentist (a) provide a written letter of apology to the woman for his breach of the Code; (b) participate in a course/training relevant to the issues raised in this case (root canal procedure, treatment planning, oral surgery); and (c) provide HDC with his reflections and learnings from this course/training, reflect on the advice provided by the HDC expert, and report back to HDC on whether any further changes could be made to his practice.