

## Understanding the Relationship between Dental Professionalism and Preferred Provider Status

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### Introduction

Over the last few decades there have been major environmental and contextual changes in health care, such as the proliferation of private health insurance (including dental insurance) and the emergence of a "health care marketplace". One method by which health insurers hope to contain costs and manage treatment quality is via contracted dentist schemes, commonly known as a Preferred Provider Schemes, under which the dentist agrees to work in a particular manner at a pre-specified fee rate for the contracted period. In return, the funding agent promotes the service of the contracted dentist(s) to its patient members. When working under such contractual arrangements dentists become implementers of policies determined by the funding agent.

### Aims

The aims of this research are to:

- provide some insight into how a change in the working landscape is impacting on dental professionalism, autonomy and patient relationships; and
- explore how individual dentists are responding to and adjusting their work practices in light of their preferred provider status.

### Rationale

By providing some insight into how a change in the working landscape is impacting on dental professionalism, autonomy and patient relationships, this project hopes to identify the key adjustments (ethical, legal and professional) that need to be made, and to develop strategies to respond to these altered work conditions.

### Methodology

As there is little known about this subject, this project will use a qualitative approach (in depth interviews of a range of dentists) to identify and explore themes important to dentists and use the insights gained to develop an explanatory theory. The theory will be tested on an appropriate audience.

### What are the expected outcomes?

It is anticipated this project will examine the impact of Preferred Providers on dental professionalism and dentists' experience of clinical and ethical decision-making and develop an explanatory theory or concept of the impact of the altered dental service delivery model.

