HELP...MY BEST ASSISTANT JUST PIERCED HER TONGUE. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

The following messages were taken from the message boards at www.dentaltown.com. Here is a Townie conversation on practice management policies. You can find these messages under the Dental Assistant's forum under Questions, Concerns and Complaints.

To my surprise my assistant of five years got her tongue pierced! She says that after a month she can put in a small flat clear retainer that will not be seen. She’s a good dependable assistant but this goes against my philosophy for promoting and being an example for good oral health. What do you think I should do now?

rbmalekdds
Official Townie
Member # 9572

I find it repulsive when a waitress is taking my order with any kind of piercing, especially a tongue piercing. In a health related office, it would speak very poorly of you to have someone dealing with patients who has her tongue pierced.

I would give her an ultimatum--either get rid of the tongue stud or look for employment in a strip club.

brian
Official Townie
Member # 8108

Well I would be careful about how you go about things. Although it is repulsive and goes against what we promote the question will be how does this affect job performance? If you terminate her it would be without reason. Do you have an office policy manual forbidding this? Does it affect her appearance in any way that will detract from your office? If she keeps her mouth shut it who would know? I’m not sure of the legally correct way to handle this situation but I would be careful. I suppose if you could prove that it detracts from your business or it goes against a stated policy then you could let her go if she is made aware of the policy and refuses to remove the spike. Of course it is so hard to find good staff these days it’s almost a joke. Everybody does their own thing and employers have to bend over backwards and take it. Even high scale stores are forced to hire people that frankly don’t represent their image but when you need a body sometimes you take what you can get and hope for the best. A good recession that puts people out of work will smarten people up as far as how they present themselves etc.

paul caselle
Official Townie
Member # 8595

I am not sure if I would give her an ultimatum but I sure would want to do something. If you have an office/employee manual that addresses appropriate/professional appearance, I certainly feel you have grounds.

BTW, if you have an employee dental plan, I would not cover any fracture or tooth loss caused by the piercing.

rmelkers
Official Townie
Member # 7957

My office policy includes a provision prohibiting visible body piercing (and tattoos) except for a single ear (traditional) piercing. I also have something about fingernails. I think your policy has to be specific rather than just a rule of “professional appearance.” If anyone wants a copy of my manual, I’d be happy to e-mail it. It’s in MS Word format. Keep in mind I’m not a lawyer and I did the manual myself. But, I think it’s pretty good.

Mike Barr
Official Townie
Member # 8298

I would simply forbid it to be worn on the job. After all we are promoting good oral health and these things are going against that principle. I don’t think that it would be a good idea on your part to fire her. I would think that there could be repercussions from that especially if you already have let her know your disapproval. If your office policy states no visible piercing then you have the right to ask her to not have it at work but I don’t think that you have the right to say what she does after work. By the way, I think all piercing are repulsive! What is going on in this world of ours.

cbunorth
Official Townie
Member # 8097

Would you allow your chairside to assist if her oral hygiene was bad? How about if she was visibly missing a tooth? If, indeed, she can wear a retainer after a month then tell her she is off chairside until then. Have her take available vacation and then have her do recall, help with billing, cleaning, or whatever needs to be done. It isn’t to be punitive but simply a way to prevent her stupidity (can you tell I have an opinion about this??) from encouraging your patient, whose dental health and education is your responsibility, from doing the same thing. Not only will this be good cross training but also a good motivator for other staff to not be too hasty with such destructive and potentially dangerous tattoos and other body art.

l
Official Townie
Member # 9406

Well, aren’t we a bunch of smug hypocrites. I have two pierce marks on my right breast. I also practiced 20 years with #7 missing. I got those two pierce marks from “Blood wings” when I earned the EFMB in the Army. In my practice I have many pierced tongues. Most of them came from other more sanctimonious practices. I see less teeth damage out of them than those uptown bulimic bleached-out witches. Do your own thing, that’s cool. But for every one that you degrade for what they do for fashion there are two who degrade you. Mike, I predict that your daughter will get a piercing just to get a rise out of you. I guess since you all can’t degrade the African Americans anymore you’ve settled to pick on the genXers.

daniel
Official Townie
Member # 8633
Tongue Piercing continued...

Haven’t had this problem with staff but if it did come up the individual would have the choice of removing the offending accessory, resigning or immediate reassignment to the basement reviewing old charts for recalls and they don’t call my basement the dungeon for nothing. Come to think of it there might be a silver lining How’s this sound; market a t-shirt that says, (front) Dr. Mikey’s Family Dental Center, where we cater to your every need...(back) Been there, pierced that...

We all have opinions on what we find attractive and its a sticky situation to impose your ideals upon another. Mike Barr
Official Townie
Member # 8175

I KNEW there was something I was leaving out of my new office design... a DUNGEON!!!

My assistant recently had her earlobes pierced and stretched to the point where she can stick full size instrument trays in them. Once you get past the visual, it actually frees up her hands to do more tasks chairside. I’m trying to get her to do a nose piercing as well--need a place to hang my curing light!

drmjlans
Official Townie
Member # 8670

My office manual has changed as my staff (ok, my former staff) comes up with ways to challenge it. It now states that staff cannot have visible tattoos or piercing other than tone per ear. It also states that staff cannot come to work smelling of smoke or heavy perfume. My interview has this question: "Our office policy states that you not have odor of smoke or heavy perfume. Will you be able to comply with this?” I was told that would be the best way to go legally.

My office policy states that you not have odor of smoke or heavy perfume. Will you be able to comply with this?” I was told that would be the best way to go legally.

Here’s a pet peeve of mine when it comes to staff appearance--nail polish that is all chipped and picked at so that it looks really tacky and cheap instead of well manicured and attractive. Luckily, my current staff does not have this problem. I had to inform a former assistant that chipped and unkempt nail polish was not allowed. She got ticked off at me. Too bad, so sad. She’s gone.

You can set your policy anyway you want to! If a tattoo or piercing will be offensive or a safety hazard to the operator, then you can add that to your protocol. Dentistry has been so “scared” for so many years about what can and cannot be done that the profession has become so paranoid it can’t operate using common sense. It’s time for dentistry, a specialty in medicine, to take charge and educate this country what dentistry is all about! Janet, a tattoo and/or piercing is the first thing a pt will see. Would you continue to see your phys if the receptionist had a tattoo that showed and numerous piercing? Come on, let’s get real! The answer is NO!

Robert W. Ankrom, RDH
Official Townie
Member # 9356

The company has CD’s with job descriptions. Further information is available from their website at: www.bent-ericksen.com or by calling: 916-333-0973 or by calling: 916-933-5117 or you can fax your request to: 916-333-0973

Thinking that you’ll never need an employee manual, is common for those who have never been put to the test. You very well may not need one, but ask yourself a few questions. Have you ever terminated a person? Did you warn them in writing? How many times is a person allowed to be late before reprimand or termination? Do your employees know this?

Why You Need an Employee Manual

The DentalTown message boards are a great place to gain insight as to what other dental professionals have included in their manuals as well as discuss areas of concern.

Dr. Howard Farran’s Employee Handbook, used at his Today’s Dental practice in Phoenix, AZ, is a 20-pg HR policy manual–including general guidelines on dress codes, absences, benefits, treatment diagnosis policies, Email and Internet guidelines and more!

The complete handbook, on a floppy disk (in MS Word) along with a full printed version is available for $49.00 plus $5.00 shipping. The first 50 orders also include Todays Dental’s job descriptions. Order by calling: 480-598-0001.