

DISABLED PATIENTS

1. Must a dentist pay for an interpreter for a hearing impaired patient?

The Americans with Disabilities Act applies to all private dental offices as they are viewed as places of public accommodation. As such, a dentist must provide reasonable accommodations to disabled individuals. There are times, therefore, when a dentist may have to pay for the services of an interpreter for a hearing impaired patient to achieve effective communication. The answer will depend on if another reasonable alternative accommodation is satisfactory. For example, many hearing impaired patients may be very good lip-readers or prefer to communicating through written notes. The Americans with Disabilities Act does encourage discussion with the individual as to the accommodation. A dentist may not terminate a hearing impaired patient because s/he does not want to pay for an interpreter.

2. What are the office's obligations under the American with Disabilities Act?

Existing dental offices must remove barrier to care that exist for disabled patients. Renovated or new offices must be accessible.