

Dental Specialty Advertising

General dentists who advertise certain specialty treatments must also include a statement that they are not certified as specialists, according to state law and administrative rules.

Describing themselves as “general dentists” in the ads isn't enough to comply with the parameters of dental specialty advertising as set out in state law, the rules of the Michigan Board of Dentistry, and an opinion from the Michigan Department of Attorney General.

Although state law doesn't bar a general dentist from practicing any specialized dental service – identified as prosthodontics, endodontics, oral and maxillofacial surgery, orthodontics, pediatric dentistry, periodontics, and oral pathology – any advertisement of these services must include a statement or disclaimer indicating that the dentist is not a certified specialist.

The disclosure requirement applies even if the advertisement doesn't list the specialty by name. For example, a general dentist who lists “braces” as one of several services offered is simply telling the public about a procedure the dentist may lawfully perform. The phrase, “expertise in braces,” however, implies special knowledge or ability in a specialty and the disclosure would be required.

When the Bureau of Health Professions receives information alleging improper, fraudulent or misleading advertising, a licensing check is made to determine if the dentist is certified in one of the dental specialties. If the dentist is properly certified, the person filing the allegation is notified that the advertising complies with state law, the rules of the Board of Dentistry, and the Attorney General's opinion.

If the dentist isn't certified in a specialty field, a letter is sent to the licensee explaining the law, professional rules, and Attorney General's opinion. It also asks for written notification of measures the dentist intends to take to comply with the law.

For those who don't respond to the letter or don't bring their advertising into compliance, an investigation is conducted and a Cease and Desist Order, requiring the dentist to stop the improper advertising, is issued.

The Cease and Desist Order becomes a Final Order if it is not contested or if it is contested and the Disciplinary Subcommittee of the Board of Dentistry determines that the dentist has engaged in improper advertising.

The Final Order goes on the dentist's permanent Michigan record, is listed on the Department's Disciplinary Action Report, and becomes part of the National Practitioner Data Bank.

For more information, call the Health Regulatory Division in the Bureau of Health Professions, at (517) 335-7212.