

The Daughter Test: A Guiding Principle for Ethical Dentistry

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In an era increasingly driven by social media trends and the “quick fixes”, the clinical decision-making in dentistry faces unprecedented pressure. Treatment plans, not necessarily “necessary” have been marketed directly to the public and popularized. The overwhelming demands have shaken the foundations of evidence-based care and ethical practice. In times like these, the daughter test holds the key.

First introduced by Dr. Martin Kelleher, the Daughter Test is an informal concept primarily invoked in aesthetic and restorative dentistry.¹ Its core principle, “Would I be happy if this treatment was done on my loved ones?” “This personal framing serves simple yet a litmus test for the standard of care. A univocal “yes” suggests a plan that is likely ethical, conservative, and aligned with the patient's long-term interests while a “no” or even hesitation, the need for re-evaluation of the intervention.

The test, however isn't flawless. It is inherently subjective, one clinician's acceptable margin of

intervention may differ from another's based on training, experience, and philosophical approach. It is, therefore, a complement to formal ethics, not a replacement. It serves as a personal checkpoint, a prompt for deep reflection.

In conclusion, the Daughter test demands standard of care, the care we would expect for our own family, thereby, re-centering the dentist-patient relationship on its ethical core: trust, preservation, and well-being. Embracing this mindset is not a step backward, but a vital step forward in defending the soul of our profession.

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