

## Clearance for a Medical Procedure



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I recently reviewed a matter which touched on the dentist's role in providing "clearance" for a prosthetic joint replacement surgery. In that case, an orthopaedic surgeon requested his patient see her dentist to get clearance before having hip replacement surgery. The surgeon was likely asking the dentist to provide an objective opinion regarding any probable areas of focal infection within the oral cavity.

Dentists and surgeons should certainly work collaboratively in identifying and treating any presurgery oral infections. My concern with this collaborative effort is the use of the term "clearance." A dentist can document the patient's oral health, including any potential problems, treat obvious areas of focal infection/inflammation, and consult with the orthopaedic surgeon regarding the findings. However, dentists, in my opinion, *cannot* provide clearance (official authorization for the surgery to go forward) for prosthetic joint replacement surgery.

My advice is to make it abundantly clear in your documentation and responses that you only evaluated the condition of the patient's oral cavity and, if necessary, treated probable infection or inflammation. The surgeon must decide, based on your evaluation and treatment, to clear the patient for surgery.

Successfully treating areas of concern does not ensure the patient is cleared for surgery or the surgery will be complication-free as it relates to infection. Dental clearance is inaccurate because it implies there are no risks.

No patient is free of risk when undergoing surgery or any medical/dental procedure. The goal of an evaluation is to determine the level of risk and identify opportunities to mitigate that risk—with the surgeon and the assessing dentist working in concert. The decision to proceed with an operation remains with the surgeon and the patient.

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