



**IT'S THE LAW** by John M. Green, DDS, JD

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# The ability to self-critique is an important risk management exercise

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**W**HO LIKES TO DO A SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THEIR DENTAL PRACTICE?  
Not many.

However, the need for dental professionals to self-critique their practices is important not only in improving the patient's experience in your office but also in serving as a risk management exercise.

Here's why:

We all wish every dental case turned out favorably but they don't. So there are lessons to be learned from these situations, whether the staff should have phoned the patients to see how they were doing after the root canal or extraction or the dentist should have re-made that crown with the open margin before it was cemented.

Self-critique allows for professional growth. Rather than burying one's head in the sand, a dental professional must be able to see how he or she could do better in order to enhance the patient's experience. Happy patients are more likely to refer others to you and are less likely to file a lawsuit or a board complaint.

Self-assessment is also important in seeing what dental procedures the dentist does well and which ones are troublesome. Therefore, the ability to determine one's strengths and weaknesses is a crucial component of risk management, as the dentist

needs to know when to refer those cases to specialists. For example, if you are struggling with molar endodontics, then either take a hands-on continuing education course or refer those patients to an endodontist.

In addition, you can use patients' complaints (and compliments) about you or your office staff to make changes or to continue to improve upon what is already working. If patients consistently complain about the front desk receptionist, the receptionist can change or you can replace the receptionist.

- In addition to reviewing employee performance, why not dare to have the employees review you as uncomfortable as that might be. This form of critique may provide insights into areas that the dental professional needs to change or improve upon. For instance, maybe the dentist should know if he or she has bad breath.

- Furthermore, patients often post online reviews or place written comments in a "suggestion box" in the waiting room. And while these comments are not really "self-critique," they do provide an avenue for the dental professional to assess his or her skills and chairside manner, staff friendliness/competence, and the overall dental practice so that necessary steps can be taken to improve and to reduce legal risks. ■

The above article does not constitute legal advice but is for educational purposes only. In order to obtain legal advice, a personal consultation with an attorney is required. The views expressed in this column are those of the writer and not necessarily the opinions of the Chicago Dental Society. Dr. Green is a practicing dentist and defense attorney who has been representing dentists and dental specialists for more than 28 years. Find more information on Dr. Green at [www.greenlawoffice.net](http://www.greenlawoffice.net).