

The Ethics of Jaw Wiring for Weight Loss by Dentists in South Africa: A Principlist Analysis

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Abstract : The increasing prevalence of obesity has driven the pursuit of alternative weight loss strategies, such as jaw wiring (or 'slimming wires'), a technique known in the medical community as maxillomandibular fixation, which has evolved beyond its original intention of treating temporomandibular joint disorders. Individuals have increasingly sought and utilized the procedure for weight loss purposes. Although legal in South Africa, this trend presents dentists with ethical dilemmas, as they face requests for interventions that prioritize aesthetic preferences over medical necessity. Drawing on scholarly literature and the four principles framework of Beauchamp and Childress, this ethical analysis offers guidance for dentists facing the ethical dilemma of patient requests for jaw wiring as a weight management intervention. The ethical analysis concludes that dentists who refuse autonomous requests to perform jaw wiring for purely weight loss purposes are ethically justified within the principlist framework in overriding these requests when the principles of non-maleficence and beneficence are at stake. The well-being and health of the patient, as well as societal and professional obligations, justify the refusal to perform jaw wiring purely for weight loss.

Keywords : ethics, jaw wiring, maxillomandibular fixation, principlism, weight loss

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