

These Guidelines are provided by the American Association of Orthodontists (AAO) to assist its member in situations that often arise during treatment. We will address two different scenarios involving patient transfer: patients who must transfer because of change of location, and patients who are not moving, but choose to transfer their care to another orthodontist.

While these Guidelines set forth general principles, individual situations may differ. These Guidelines should not be construed as absolute rules that apply in all instances. In each case, the orthodontist must assess the situation, consult with legal counsel as necessary, and make an independent conclusion as how best to proceed.

The Guidelines were not developed to establish standards of care or to be used for litigation purposes. Such uses are beyond the scope intended for these Guidelines.

AAO members are bound by federal and state laws, the AAO's Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct and the American Dental Association's Principles of Ethics and Code of Professional Conduct. These laws and Principles supersede these Guidelines. As such, these Guidelines are subject to such laws and the ethical rules.

RECOMMENDED PROCEDURE FOR THE TRANSFERRING ORTHODONTIST

Patients Who Wish to Transfer Because of Change of Residence

1. When a patient alerts you that they must transfer their orthodontic care to a new area, try to identify one or more orthodontists in that area who will be willing to accept the transfer. (The AAO Member Web site, AAOinfo.org, can be very helpful. Select "AAO Directory" at the top of the home page and then go to "Find the Nearest Member Orthodontist.") A phone call or e-mail to area orthodontists to see if they are accepting transfer patients will also greatly benefit your patient in their search.
2. Give the patient a copy of the AAO form "Advice for the Transferring Orthodontic Patient."
3. It is very useful for the accepting orthodontist to have as much information as possible about the transferring patient at the initial exam. Consider sending the AAO transfer form to the accepting orthodontist before the patient arrives. If the patient is unsure of who the new orthodontist will be, you may elect to give the departing patient a brief summary of treatment to date (see "Introduction of Transferring Patient" form). If initial photos and x-rays can be easily duplicated, you may consider sending them to the orthodontist or with the patient as well.
4. The accepting orthodontist should receive the best quality records possible. The transferring orthodontist should review the integrity of all records being

transferred. If your radiographs are overexposed or underexposed, consider having them reproduced and enhanced by a full-service photo finishing service. Poorly exposed photos can often be similarly improved.

Study models should be trimmed to occlusion. If you use computer-generated study models, your company probably has a protocol for transferring records. If you are an OrthoCad user, OrthoCad will send a CD with viewing software and the patient's 3D model to the accepting orthodontist, without charge.

5. The patient/parents/legal guardian should be informed that there may be different fees with treatment by different practitioners.

Patients Who Wish to Transfer Because of Dissatisfaction with Current Orthodontist

1. A patient who wishes to see another orthodontist rarely asks the treating orthodontist for a referral. In the rare event, however, that the patient requests the names of other orthodontists, the treating orthodontist should provide the patient with the name(s) of other area orthodontists.
2. Upon the patient's written request, copies of all treatment records should be forwarded to the accepting orthodontist, or to the patient, if requested. The original treating orthodontist should retain all original records. A reasonable fee may be charged for records duplication. However, treatment records cannot be withheld because the patient has an outstanding balance.

RECOMMENDED PROCEDURES FOR THE ACCEPTING ORTHODONTIST

1. If the patient did not receive a copy of "Advice for the Transferring Orthodontic Patient" from the transferring orthodontist, give the patient a copy.
2. Request copies of all treatment records and the AAO transfer form from the referring orthodontist.
3. Document thoroughly the patient's condition upon starting treatment in your practice.
4. While you must candidly explain your assessment of the case, you should refrain from any unnecessary remarks about the previous orthodontic treatment that could be construed as negative. The patient has been advised that orthodontic philosophies can vary from orthodontist to orthodontist.
5. If you are unable or unwilling to accept transfer patients, because of dissimilar technique, consider referring the request to another AAO member for treatment.
6. Consider the patient's best interest in deciding whether to accept a case with differing treatment philosophy or appliance.