

BOOK REVIEW

L. J. Levine, D.D.S.¹

A Review of "Legal Considerations in Dentistry"

REFERENCE: Willig, S. H., *Legal Considerations in Dentistry*, Williams and Wilkins, Baltimore, Md., 1971, 276 pages, \$12.50.

This book will be a very valuable addition to the library of both the dental practitioner and the dental student. It is easily understandable, very comprehensive, and if read carefully, will lift much of the shroud of mystery which surrounds the law for most dentists.

The 276 pages include thirteen chapters, an appendix summarizing two state dental practice acts, and a glossary of legal terms which in itself is a most welcome reference source for the dental practitioner.

The text probes such subjects as Origins of Laws, State Boards, Evidence, The Attorney, Court Systems of the United States and Canada, Federal and State Drug and Narcotics Laws, Torts, Negligence, Contracts, Taxes, Insurance, Estate Planning, and Future Problems.

Chapters 1 and 2 should be compulsory reading for those of the dental profession. Chapter 1 provides an excellent insight into the origins and evolution of the laws under which dentists practice. Chapter 2 is an illuminating discussion of the origins and philosophy for the existence of state dental boards and of the police powers delegated to these boards. Study of this chapter is essential before one plunges into the controversy surrounding the relationship of these bodies to 20th century America.

The major portion of the text concerned with torts, duty, evidence, the courtroom, negligence, contracts, fraud, and consents contains many major revelations for the dentist which will be invaluable in the event he becomes party to a suit. Indeed, lessons learned here may well become the basis for his successful defense of a potential lawsuit.

The status of and relationship to employees are discussed and should prove useful to many readers. It is valuable to read the chapters covering taxes, insurance, and estate planning for although we usually rely upon professionals for advice in these areas, confirmation of their opinions is most reassuring.

The final chapter, a look at problems present and future, is a sympathetic discussion of some of the areas plaguing the profession today and those likely to occur in the coming years.

¹ Consultant in forensic dentistry, Office of Chief Medical Examiner, City of New York, and clinical assistant professor of forensic medicine, New York University School of Medicine, New York, N.Y. 10016.

The chapter headings with detailed subheadings make searching for a particular point relatively simple as does the quite detailed ten-page index. Many of the points discussed include the citing of the case decision. While this may be valuable for the lawyer, the average dentist has neither the technical ability nor the law library available to enable him to find specific details of the case in question. It may have been more meaningful to the dentist if the fact pattern in some of the cases had been included in the text so that he could more easily relate the legal principle involved to his own experience.

The author's brief, three paragraph discussion of the important area of Forensic Odontology was a disappointment. After discussing so many diverse areas with such competence the rather naive, oversimplified approach to this field came as a surprise. Material on "small claims" litigation also would have been welcomed.

The subject of dental jurisprudence has often been treated in a very casual manner in the professional education of dentist. Obviously, knowledge of this area is vital in order to avoid the perils and pitfalls of costly litigation. This book will admirably fill a considerable portion of the vacuum left by meager exposure to this discipline. The reader will not only be left with a far greater understanding of the law but will be able to react with an emotion other than fear if he should be confronted by a legal problem.