Orthodontists have many similar attributes, but a common thread that binds us is the desire to help and care for people with needs. In order to define those limitations even further, one must recognize we all have an obligation to act morally and ethically for ourselves, our patients, the communities in which we are members and society in general. These are some of the principles of social justice. What is social justice? It is a term that refers to the concept in which justice is achieved in every aspect of society, not just the administration of laws. This term can refer to self-contradictory values of justice and is sometimes considered amorphous or unstructured. Most often, social justice refers to an individual's, a group's, fair treatment of an impartial share of the benefits afforded by society, or the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within a society.

To help define how orthodontics and social justice are related, one must recognize that professionalism is the central cog in this wheel. To be professional means we prescribe to the code of ethics that are taken for granted in dentistry; if we prehend this ethic, we have to make it part of us.

Medicine, of course, requires all graduating medical students to abide by the Hippocratic oath, but orthodontics does not have such an oath. Is it truly necessary? Without an oath is the physician less likely to perform his or her duties with any less professionalism? Does a physician less likely to perform his or her duties according to ethical and moral duties and values, and (c) an equal opportunity for all individuals to pursue a life of their own preference by devising principles and practices that encourage integrity and fairness in an ethical manner.

An ethic of identity for social transformation.

What is social justice? It is a term that refers to the orientation of care for the well being of others, which is recognized through (a) careful attention to concerns and needs of others, (b) acknowledgment of the complexity, and (c) even vagueness that concerns the circumstances of ourselves and others. Social justice requires an acknowledgement of the complexities that attend individuals, the need for close attentiveness to such complexities and support for practices within institutions consistent application to fixed rules.

An ethic of individual choice and justice as procedural fairness.

Many scholars claim the above concepts disregard the views of ethics and social justice held by those from other cultures, or whose identity is neither that of particular individuals, community members or based on the standpoint of all other people who are excluded due to marginalization, minority, racial, gender or sexual preferences biases. Ethically, this means people should be understood and respected in terms of their own identity, whether in terms of their own culture, gender or in other ways. Therefore, social justice principles and practices require that support be provided to all individuals for sustaining different identities (language, primary group associations, etc.) Those who view social justice ethics through the lens of identity often call for social transformation as a necessary building block for a more just social order.

For more on ethics, see Michael Meru’s article on page 12.