As Rushworth Kidder (2006) suggested, moral courage bridges talking ethically and performing ethically. Although Kidder’s book is meant for everyone, it is a must for physicians and dentists.

Performing ethically is not always easy and is therefore important to be stressed during formal educational programs. Dental students must recognize that moral courage is frequently needed to address ethical issues in order to take action to do the right thing when questionable issues arise with patients that place the clinician in an uncomfortable position.

Health-care professionals often face complex ethical dilemmas in the workplace; some clinicians tackle ethical issues directly while others turn away regarding whether a doctor is involved with private clinical practice, education, research or administration, they are not immune to facing moral dilemmas or experiencing unethical behavior. Moral courage takes into account the principles of ethics and the courage to act accordingly. Courage is not the absence of fear; it is doing what’s right even in the presence of fear.

Educators and scholars have disputed the diverse meaning of moral courage over the centuries. Ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle repeatedly used this term in reference to character on the battlefield, discussing courage as a trait set aside for situations where individuals feared death. Aristotle specifically discussed moral courage in the context of being able to wage war while being mindful of the possibility of injury or death. To Aristotle, bravery was a virtue that enabled Greek soldiers to respond appropriately to the fear of the battle. How a doctor responds to ethical dilemmas depends on his or her (a) previ-

The AAO’s Principles of Ethics and Professional Code of Conduct, Section VI, states, “Members may exercise dis-
certification or (c) personal values. The term moral courage is defined in reference to character and varies from one person to another.

Although dental schools and hospital clinics often accept fee reimbursement from federal funding, most private practitioners do not. It is considered discriminatory for a dental school or hospital faculty to reject a patient based on a disability, even though a “contract” between the clinician and the patient at a screening evaluation might not yet have been established. It would also be unsafe to refuse a pa-
tient from your private practice if the reason is based on discrimination, in-
cluding any of the reasons listed in the AAO’s Principles of Ethics and Professional Code of Conduct.

Even though there is no universally accepted Hippocratic oath for dentists, it should be stressed to our dental students that they must adhere to affirmations such as:

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