



Advisory Note: The following guidance reflects risk-management best practices. Practitioners should consult legal counsel for jurisdiction-specific advice regarding patient dismissal procedures.

1. The Legal and Clinical Dilemma

Temporary crowns are structurally weak, semi-porous, and held by temporary cement meant to last only a few weeks. Leaving them in place for over a long period highly predisposes the patient to recurrent caries, microleakage, fracture, pulpal death, or dental abscesses.

Dismissing a patient who has unfinished temporary crown(s) presents a potential risk of clinical complications and potential claims. Even though the patient may have been the reason for the delay by abandoning care, your practice could face liability if you terminate the relationship while leaving the patient in an unstable, unsafe oral health condition without a clear roadmap to safety.

2. Two Legally Compliant Paths Forward

To protect your dental practice, you should choose one of the following two risk-management strategies:

Option A: Stabilize First, Then Dismiss (Recommended Safe Route)

Inform the patient that due to the severe health risks of long-term temporary restorations, it is strongly inadvisable from both a clinical and risk-management standpoint to dismiss them until those specific teeth are stabilized. Offer a single, final clinical appointment strictly dedicated to removing the temporary restorations, evaluating the underlying tooth structure for decay, and placing long-term, durable temporary materials or definitive restorations (if paid for). Once the immediate risk of tooth loss or infection is controlled, proceed with the formal 30-day dismissal process.

Option B: Urgent, High-Risk Formal Dismissal

If the patient remains entirely non-compliant, hostile, or refuses to come in for stabilization, you should issue an expedited, highly specialized dismissal letter. If the patient refuses to come in, rather than send a “dismissal letter” suggesting that you are terminating the relationship, it may be more accurate to send an “acknowledgement letter” which documents that the patient is the one who is terminating the relationship by refusing

to come in for placement of the long-term restoration. This letter should still explicitly highlight the potentially catastrophic dental risks they face by refusing to finish the treatment. You should outline that leaving temporary crowns in place can result in tooth loss, root canals, or severe infection.

3. Required Elements for the Dismissal Letter

If executing a dismissal for a patient with open temporary crowns, the certified letter must include:

- **Specific Clinical Warnings:** Explicitly detail the exact teeth involved and state that temporary crowns disintegrate, leak, and lead to tooth loss or severe pain.
- **30-Day Emergency Window:** Explicitly state that you will provide emergency care only for the next 30 days to keep them safe while they find a new provider. Note: Practitioners should confirm their state dental board's specific requirements regarding notice periods, as these may vary by jurisdiction.
- **Urgent Recommendation to Find a Dentist:** Emphasize that they must see a new dentist immediately to avoid permanent dental damage
- **Records Transfer Offer:** Offer to instantly send radiographs, imaging and all records to a new dentist upon receiving a signed authorization form

4. Mandatory Chart Documentation

To defend against abandonment claims, your clinical chart should demonstrate the patient non-compliance. Ensure the following items are permanently logged: all missed or cancelled appointments, the original dates the temporary crowns were placed, every phone call or voicemail or text attempted by your staff, documentation of any informed refusal (i.e., notations that the patient was advised of the risks of not completing treatment and declined or failed to schedule), and a digital scan of the certified mail receipt showing delivery or refusal.

It is recommended that you send the letter in two ways: Certified with return receipt requested **and** regular mail. Electronic communications (e.g., patient portal messages) may supplement but should not replace the certified mailing. This way the patient cannot say I didn't get it.

5. Next Steps

If you are facing this situation with a current patient, contact Dentists Choice Risk Management before initiating the dismissal process. Early consultation allows us to

help you select the appropriate path, review your documentation, and ensure your dismissal letter meets best-practice standards for your jurisdiction.