

Independent medical exams, also known as “non-treating” medical exams, are frequent sources of complaints to the College of Physicians & Surgeons.

Who requests independent medical examinations?

The WCB, an insurance company, an employer or some other third party usually requests independent medical examinations (IMEs).

It is important to note that an IME is not done at the request of the patient and that it is not done for the purpose of providing treatment.

What is the purpose of an independent medical examination?

Third parties ask the independent physician examiner to provide his/her opinion based on the history, physical examination, review of supplementary material, and any investigations that may have been done.

Conflict and concerns about independent medical examinations.

Independent medical examinations are prone to generate conflict and a formal complaint thus involving the College.

Conflict surrounding these examinations arises for many reasons:

- The examining physician and the patient have no “doctor-patient” relationship.
- The purpose of the exam may be contrary to the patient’s interests.
- The opinion expressed may have a negative effect on what benefits the patient receives.
- The exam may be conducted on a background of conflict (typically between the patient and the third party).

Often the concerns brought to our attention include:

- Disagreement with the physician examiner’s diagnosis.
- The examining physician’s diagnosis and recommendations may differ from those offered by the patient’s treating physicians and other care-givers.
- The examination was incomplete.
- The physician was not impartial.

What is the College’s role?

The College’s role in inquiring into a complaint arising from an IME is not to cause the physician to change his/her opinion; rather, it is to ensure that the examiner followed a proper process.

Were all the necessary elements of such an examination completed?

Did the physician’s conclusions logically connect to the information gathered and reviewed?

If the answer to these questions is yes, we are not likely going to direct the physician to change his or her opinion and recommendations.

It is important to remember that the physician does not make the decision as to benefits a patient receives. The physician is paid to provide his/her opinion only; the third party is the one who decides how that report is used.