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Doctors have new rules for after-hours patient care and critical test results

Alberta physicians must have arrangements in place to triage patients and to receive critical diagnostic test results after regular office hours.

That's the bottom line for a revised standard of practice on *Continuity of Care*, approved by the Council of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta last month and effective today.

Although the *Continuity of Care* standard is new, the expectations within it are not. A similar expectation has been in place for decades, but recent reports from physicians, the public and others suggested many physicians were not compliant, creating gaps in patient care with potentially serious results.

"We do not expect physicians to be available 24/7," notes CPSA Registrar Dr. Trevor Theman, "but they must have a system in place for after-hours care. This is good not only for patients, but allows physicians to have a reasonable work-life balance."

Physicians are encouraged to collaborate with colleagues in an on-call rotation or pursue a formal written agreement with a health care provider or referral service such as Health Link. For those rare circumstances where these options are not feasible, the College will work with physicians to find a solution.

"We recognize some physicians may find it more difficult to meet the standard than others," adds Dr. Theman. "We're developing resources to help them and are available to discuss individual circumstances."

In the short term, the College will focus on awareness and education, surveying physicians and doing spot-checks to encourage compliance with the new standard. In the long term, College staff are working on a more robust process that may include office visits.

[Learn more: Let's talk about Continuity of Care](#)

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