

STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

Boundary Violations: Personal

Under Review: No

Issued By: Council: January 1, 2010 (*Sexual Boundary Violations*)

Reissued by Council: July 1, 2018 (*Boundary Violations*); April 1, 2019 (*Boundary Violations: Personal and Boundary Violations: Sexual*)

The ***Standards of Practice*** of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta (“CPSA”) are the **minimum** standards of professional behavior and ethical conduct expected of all regulated members registered in Alberta. Standards of Practice are enforceable under the *Health Professions Act* and will be referenced in the management of complaints and in discipline hearings. CPSA also provides **Advice to the Profession** to support the implementation of the Standards of Practice.

A regulated member who is uncertain about the potential for a boundary violation should consult with CPSA or another relevant advisory body (e.g., [Canadian Medical Protective Association](#)).

Physician-Patient Relationship

1. A regulated member **must** maintain professional boundaries in any interaction with a patient, including but not limited to:
 - a. providing adequate draping;
 - b. providing privacy while the patient is undressing or dressing;
 - c. obtaining [informed consent](#) for intimate or sensitive examinations; and
 - d. using appropriate examination techniques when touching sensitive or personal areas of the body, including but not limited to breasts, genitalia or anus.
2. A regulated member **must** consider and minimize any potential [conflict of interest](#) or risk of coercion when engaging with a patient in a non-clinical context (i.e., in a personal, social, financial or business relationship).
3. A regulated member **must not**:
 - a. enter into a close personal relationship with a patient or any person with whom a patient has a significant interdependent relationship (e.g., parent, guardian, child or significant other);

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- “Must” refers to a mandatory requirement.
- “May” means that the physician may exercise reasonable discretion.
- “Patient” includes, where applicable, the patient’s legal guardian or substitute decision maker.

- b. socialize or communicate with a patient for the purpose of pursuing a close personal relationship; or
 - c. [terminate](#) a physician-patient relationship for the purpose of pursuing a close personal relationship.
4. A regulated member **must not** enter into a close personal relationship with a former patient unless:
- a. the regulated member has **never** provided the patient with psychotherapeutic treatment;
 - b. there is minimal risk of a continuing power imbalance; and
 - c. sufficient time has passed since the last clinical encounter, given the nature and extent of the physician-patient relationship.
5. A regulated member **must not** promote his/her personal or religious beliefs or causes to a patient in the context of the physician-patient relationship.

Physician-Learner and Physician-Subordinate Relationships

6. A regulated member **must not**:
- a. sexualize a teacher-learner relationship by making sexual comments or gestures toward a learner¹;
 - b. enter into a close personal or sexual relationship with a learner while directly or indirectly responsible for mentoring, teaching, supervising or evaluating that learner; or
 - c. enter into any relationship with a learner that could present a risk of conflict of interest or coercion while directly or indirectly responsible for mentoring, teaching and/or evaluating that learner.

¹ "Learner" includes but is not limited to clinical trainee, medical student, other health professional learner, graduate student, resident or fellow.

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7. A regulated member who has a pre-existing (current or past) close personal or sexual relationship with a learner or a subordinate physician **must**:
 - a. notify the applicable clinical and academic leaders of the relationship;
 - b. remove him/herself from any role teaching or evaluating the subordinate physician or learner; and
 - c. remove him/herself from any discussion of the performance of the subordinate physician or learner.

RELATED STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

- [Boundary Violations: Sexual](#)
- [Code of Ethics & Professionalism](#)
- [Conflict of Interest](#)
- [Duty to Report a Colleague](#)
- [Informed Consent](#)
- [Terminating the Physician-Patient Relationship](#)

COMPANION RESOURCES

- [Advice to the Profession: Boundary Violations: Personal](#)
- [Patient FAQs: Personal & Sexual Boundary Violations](#)
- [CMPA's Good Practices Guide: Maintaining appropriate boundaries](#)
- [CMPA's Good Practices Guide: Why and when do we need consent?](#)

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