

STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

Terminating the Physician-Patient Relationship in Office- Based Settings

Under Review: No

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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.

1. A regulated member who terminates a relationship with a patient **must** have reasonable grounds for discharging the patient from his or her medical practice and **must** document those reasons in the [patient’s record](#).
2. A regulated member **must not** discharge a patient:
 - a. based on a prohibited ground of discrimination including age, gender, marital status, medical condition, national or ethnic origin, physical or mental disability, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status;
 - b. because a patient makes poor lifestyle choices (such as smoking);
 - c. because a patient fails to keep appointments or [pay outstanding fees](#) unless advance notice has been given to the patient;
 - d. because the patient refuses to follow medical advice unless the patient is repeatedly non-adherent despite reasonable attempts by the regulated member to address the non-adherence; or
 - e. because the regulated member [relocates](#) his or her practice to a new location/setting to which current patients could be reasonably expected to follow.
3. Notwithstanding subclause 2(e), a regulated member **may** terminate patient relationships if:
 - a. the regulated member is [changing scope of practice](#) wherein current patients would no longer fit within the new scope; or

Terms used in the Standards of Practice:

- “Regulated member” means any person who is registered or who is required to be registered as a member of this College. The College regulates physicians, surgeons and osteopaths.
- “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. a relocation occurs more than twelve (12) months after [closing an earlier practice](#).
4. When unilaterally terminating a relationship with a patient, a regulated member **must**:
 - a. give advance written notice of intention to terminate care and provide a timeline that is commensurate with the [continuing care](#) needs of the patient;
 - b. advise the patient of the reasons for termination of the physician-patient relationship unless disclosure of the reasons could be expected to:
 - i. result in immediate and grave harm to the patient’s mental or physical health or safety
 - ii. threaten the mental health and physical health or safety of another individual; or
 - iii. pose a threat to public safety;
 - c. ensure [continuity of follow-up care](#) for outstanding investigations and serious medical conditions prior to the termination date or facilitate [transfer of care](#) to another regulated member;
 - d. provide or arrange for care until the termination of care;
 - e. provide emergency services that would otherwise be unavailable to the patient after the termination date; and
 - f. establish a process for transfer of the patient’s medical information in response to future requests by the patient or an authorized third party.

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5. Notwithstanding clause (4), a regulated member **may** immediately discharge a patient if:
- a. the patient poses a safety risk to office staff, other patients or the regulated member;
 - b. the patient is abusive to the regulated member, staff or other patients;
 - c. the patient fails to respect professional boundaries or
 - d. the regulated member is [leaving medical practice](#) because of personal illness or other urgent circumstances.

RELATED STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

- [Code of Ethics & Professionalism](#)
- [Continuity of Care](#)
- [Establishing the Physician-Patient Relationship](#)

COMPANION RESOURCES

- [Sample Patient Termination Letter](#)

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