

Physicians must not disclose information about COVID-19 patients—even if anonymized



During this unprecedented situation, we are all anxious to hear the latest news about COVID-19, especially about the number of cases and the extraordinary steps we are all being asked to take to prevent further spread.

The College has been working closely with Dr. Bonnie Henry and her office to ensure timely messages are delivered to physicians. As the provincial health officer, Dr. Henry is in constant touch with her national counterparts, the Ministry of Health and the health authorities, and is therefore the most qualified spokesperson to provide British Columbians with factual and timely updates about COVID-19. During her updates, Dr. Henry is taking great care to ensure the privacy of individuals who are affected, which of course is of utmost importance.

The College has recently learned of instances where information has been posted on social media or provided to the press about individual patient cases and test results, including the identification of certain smaller communities. This is not acceptable. Physicians must not disclose information about individual patients in any setting, including stories shared directly with other people, even if patient identities are not revealed. The risk of a privacy breach is too great. In the event of a complaint from an affected patient, a breach of this nature may be considered unprofessional conduct.

Please follow the guidance of the provincial health officer and refrain from adding to the confusion and anxiety by posting alarming messages or storytelling.

Patients should be obtaining the latest and most up-to-date information from Dr. Henry's daily news conferences and the [BC Centre for Disease Control website](#).