



College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia

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March 24, 2020

RE: COVID-19: Important update from the registrar

Dear registrant,

First, I want to recognize and thank every one of you for your tremendous efforts to care for patients during this turbulent situation. I have been humbled by your professionalism and commitment, and most especially by the outpouring of offers to assist one another when the need has never been greater.

As BC has already tragically seen deaths related to COVID-19, I want to publicly acknowledge those physicians who are on the front lines caring for critically ill patients, demonstrating skill, selflessness and resilience, while at the same time managing concerns about their own health and the health of their families.

As you will have read by now, Dr. Bonnie Henry is asking physicians who work in the community to limit care to those patients who need essential urgent and emergency services, and where appropriate, to provide care by way of telephone or video technology. All services involving direct physical contact with patients should be reduced to minimal levels.

Note: If you have questions about billing for telemedicine services or need help with technology support, please contact Doctors of BC.

- For fee-related inquiries: economics@doctorsofbc.ca
- For virtual care inquiries: dtoinfo@doctorsofbc.ca

If you see patients in person, please actively screen them for potential COVID-19 symptoms to avoid accidentally exposing yourself or your staff. Patients who attend at offices must be managed in a way that physical distancing of two metres (six feet) from other patients and staff is always maintained. To be clear, it is not acceptable to have patients crowded together in a waiting room. Ideally, patients should be directed to wait in an isolated, designated space, or even in their car if possible, and be called into the office when appropriate.

In short, you will need to adapt your practice to reduce the public health risk. I appreciate that this may mean a temporary reduction in income, but there is no price that we can put on the life of someone who contracted COVID-19 in a clinical setting, which could have otherwise been avoided. This pandemic is unprecedented in our time and it will require us all to do things differently. We need to be responsive and flexible.

I know that all of you are making the care and safety of your patients your first concern. During this emergency, that means taking a measured approach to varying practice standards as the situation demands. I have confidence in your professional judgement.

I also want to assure you that during this time, we understand what you are dealing with and we will support you. In the event a concern is raised about your practice, we will take these extreme circumstances into account.

If you are assessing patients who may have COVID-19 in a community setting, please remember the importance of infection control practices, including the use of personal protective equipment (PPE). Please continue to review the [BCCDC's webpage for health professionals](#), which is updated regularly and contains best practice information on subjects such as PPE, lab testing, and infection control.

I implore every physician to follow the guidance of Dr. Bonnie Henry. For those of you who work in health authority settings, please regularly check for updates with your medical affairs office. How we collectively manage the ongoing epidemic of COVID-19 will change as circumstances evolve, and I ask that you do your part to stay informed through factual sources as we move forward.

Thank you for taking the time to read messages from the College directly, or on behalf of the provincial health officer. Now is the time to follow the advice provided by health leaders.

I would like to close with a recent quote from Dame Clare Marx, chair of the General Medical Council: "In this crisis situation, compassion, civility, and self-care will matter more than ever."

Please be kind to each other, and to yourselves.

Sincerely,

Heidi M. Oetter, MD
Registrar and CEO