



College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia

Professional Standards and Guidelines

Complementary and Alternative Therapies

Preamble

This document is a standard of the Board of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia.

College's Position

Patients have a right to make decisions about their health care including choosing complementary or alternative therapies instead of, or as an adjunct to, conventional medicine.

Physicians who choose to use complementary or alternative therapies in their practice

Physicians who choose to practise complementary or alternative therapies in combination with conventional medicine must practise in a manner that is informed by medical evidence and science and is in keeping with their professional, ethical and legal obligations. Physicians must always act within the scope of their practice based on their qualifications, skill and knowledge, and level of competence.

Physicians must:

- conduct appropriate and conventional examinations and investigations in order to establish a diagnosis and basis for treatment
- employ a rigorous medical approach before offering any complementary or alternative therapy
- not delay or supplant the use of an effective and proven therapy with a complementary or alternative therapy, except at the direction of the patient
- counsel the patient, to the best of his or her ability and knowledge, about the risks and benefits of any procedure, so that the patient can give informed consent
 - the details of the consent process, including the rationale for providing an alternative therapy as explained to the patient, must be documented in the patient's medical record
- respect the autonomy of the patient in choosing from available treatment options

- if the patient's choice of a complementary or alternative therapy has made it impossible for the physician to discharge his or her ethical responsibilities, it is acceptable for the physician to terminate the patient-physician relationship
- never exploit the emotions, vulnerability, or finances of a patient for personal gain or gratification

Professional affiliations with complementary or alternative health-care providers

Physicians are reminded that the *Health Professions Act* requires inter-professional collaborative practice between regulated health-care professionals who are governed under the same Act, even if their treatment approach differs.

In choosing to form a professional affiliation with a (regulated) complementary or alternative health-care provider, physicians should be satisfied that the proposed care or health benefit is safe, or at minimum, not more risky than comparable conventional interventions or not more risky than not receiving conventional interventions.

Physicians may seek advice on these issues by contacting the College and asking to speak with a member of the registrar staff, or by seeking medical legal advice from the CMPA.

Approved by Board: March 30, 2017

Effective: April 3, 2017

Replaces an earlier guideline on the same topic from September, 2009

References

1. College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario. Complementary/Alternative Medicine [Internet]. Toronto: College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario; 2011 Nov [cited 2017 Apr 3]. Policy No.: 3-11.