



College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia

Professional Standards and Guidelines

Ending the Patient-Physician Relationship

Preamble

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

Physicians may ethically and legally decide not to continue seeing a patient, as long as the reasons for that decision are based on the lack of an effective therapeutic relationship and not based on reasons that could be considered discriminatory.

No physician should refuse to treat a patient who is in need of emergent or urgent medical care.

College's Position

- The decision to end a patient-physician relationship should be based on a thoughtful review of the reasons for doing so and having given the patient reasonable notice of the decision.
- Communicate your decision and the reasons for your decision clearly and non-judgmentally to the patient, preferably in person.
- Follow the initial communication with a registered letter confirming your decision, ensure that the reasons for your decision and a copy of the letter are documented in the medical record.
- Give the patient a reasonable amount of time to find another physician. This time will vary according to the context of the patient's medical condition and the availability of other physicians to provide care, but a minimum of one month is advised.
- Where possible and reasonable, assist the patient in finding another physician.
- Consider providing the patient with a copy of their medical record without a fee.

Guiding Ethical Principles

CMA Code of Ethics

Responsibilities to the Patient

Initiating and Dissolving a Patient-Physician Relationship

17. In providing medical service, do not discriminate against any patient on such grounds as age, gender, marital status, medical conditions, national or ethnic origin, physical or mental disability, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. This does not abrogate the physician's right to refuse to accept a patient for legitimate reasons.
18. Provide whatever appropriate assistance you can to any person with an urgent need for medical care.
19. Having accepted professional responsibility for a patient, continue to provide services until they are no longer required or wanted; until another suitable physician has assumed responsibility for the patient; or until the patient has been given reasonable notice that you intend to terminate the relationship.

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.

See also [Leaving Practice](#)

**Approved by Executive Committee June 26, 2015
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