



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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Sample Letter

The following is a suggested wording only, please feel free to customize the letter to address the circumstances of your decision:

Dear (patient's name):

My primary obligation as your physician is to provide you with safe and effective care and treatment. As we have discussed on several occasions, I am only able to do this in the context of a mutually respectful and trusting relationship.

Use the next paragraph to outline your reasons, such as:

Over the past few months, it has become apparent to me that you are unwilling to accept and follow the medical advice that I have given you for the treatment of your condition. You have indicated to me that you do not think the treatment is necessary in spite of my medical opinion and counsel to the contrary. (Other reasons for ending the relationship might include inappropriate drug seeking, a breakdown in your interpersonal relationship, disagreements with relatives, frequent hostility, disrupting continuity of care through over-reliance on other health-care providers etc.)

Given these circumstances, I consider that it is no longer in your interest that we continue our patient-physician relationship. As I communicated to you at your last appointment, I will no longer be in a position to provide you with medical services after (insert the end date – this time will vary, but should be at least one month from the date of the letter).

I strongly urge you to obtain the services of another physician satisfactory to you as soon as possible. When you have had an opportunity to see your new physician, please ask him or her to contact me. With your written consent, I will provide a summary of my care and treatment of you while you were my patient.