



College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia

# Professional Standards and Guidelines

## Physical Examinations and Procedures

### Preamble

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

### College's Position

Physicians must conduct physical examinations and procedures in a professional and respectful manner. Except in emergency situations, physicians must always obtain patient consent before proceeding with a physical examination or procedure, which includes clearly explaining the rationale for the physical examination or procedure and what it will involve.

Physicians must:

1. Answer any questions the patient may have about the physical examination or procedure.
2. Inquire whether the patient wishes to have another person of their choice present during the physical examination or procedure, particularly with sensitive examinations or when disrobing is required.
3. Only ask questions or make comments about the patient's sexual history, behaviour or performance when the information is directly related to the physical examination or procedure, or the patient's overall health and the care being provided.
4. Be aware and respectful of the patient's cultural, spiritual or gender identity.
5. Not make remarks or gestures that may or could reasonably be interpreted as sexualized by the patient.
6. Stop the physical examination or procedure upon the patient's request.
7. Give the patient privacy to undress/dress when it is required for the physical examination or procedure.
8. Not assist the patient with the adjustment or removal of clothing unless the patient consents.
9. Provide the patient with a gown or cloth to drape during the physical examination or procedure if disrobing is required, and only expose the area specifically related to the

- physical examination or procedure. Frequently both a gown and a drape are required to ensure patient privacy and comfort.
10. Only touch the patient's breasts and/or genitals when it is medically necessary.
  11. Use gloves when performing genital, rectal or oral examinations.
  12. Ensure a parent, guardian or trusted adult is present during a genital examination of a child, unless the child has capacity to consent otherwise.

See also:

[Boundary Violations in the Patient-Physician Relationship](#)  
[Photographic, Video and Audio Recording of Patients](#)

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*Replaces an earlier guideline entitled, Sensitive Examinations, October 2009*