

PRACTICE STANDARD

Physical Examinations and Procedures

Effective: February 1, 2005

Last revised: October 25, 2023

Version: 4.4

Related topic(s): [Consent to Treatment](#); [Indigenous Cultural Safety, Cultural Humility and Anti-racism](#); [Non-sexual Boundary Violations](#); [Photographic, Video and Audio Recording of Patients](#); [Sexual Misconduct](#)

A **practice standard** reflects the minimum standard of professional behaviour and ethical conduct on a specific topic or issue expected by the College of its registrants (all physicians and surgeons who practise medicine in British Columbia). Standards also reflect relevant legal requirements and are enforceable under the [Health Professions Act](#), RSBC 1996, c.183 (*HPA*) and College [Bylaws](#) under the *HPA*.

Preamble

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

College's position

Registrants must conduct physical examinations and procedures in a professional and respectful manner. Except in emergency situations, registrants 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. Further expectations for consent are held within the [Consent to Treatment](#) practice standard.

Registrants must:

1. Answer any questions the patient may have about the physical examination or procedure.
2. For sensitive examinations, or when disrobing is required, inquire whether the patient wishes to have another person of their choice present during the physical examination or procedure.
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 or if there are any obvious non-verbal cues of discomfort, seek the patient's consent to continue.
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 sensitive examination of a minor or dependent adult, unless the minor or dependent adult has capacity to consent otherwise.

Resources

- [Physical Examinations and Procedures video](#)