

Professional Guideline

Prescribing Practices, Countersigning Prescriptions and Internet Prescribing

Effective:	June 1, 2002
Last revised:	May 6, 2022
Version:	4.2
Next review:	October 2021
Related topic(s):	Safe Prescribing of Opioids and Sedatives ; Prescribing Methadone

A **professional guideline** reflects a recommended course of action established based on the values, principles and duties of the medical profession. Physicians and surgeons may exercise reasonable discretion in their decision-making based on the guidance provided.

Registrants may seek guidance on these issues by contacting the College or by seeking medical legal advice from the CMPA or other entity.

PREAMBLE

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

COLLEGE'S POSITION

Prescribing for a patient solely on the basis of mailed or faxed information, or an electronic questionnaire, or countersigning a prescription issued by another physician or surgeon, without direct patient contact, is not an acceptable standard of medical practice.

The provision of a prescription to a patient is a medical act. It is the result of a clinical decision made by a registrant subsequent to a comprehensive evaluation of the patient by that same registrant. This evaluation should be based on a face-to-face encounter, or an appropriate virtual encounter, with the patient which includes the usual elements of clinical assessment such as the taking of a history, conducting a physical examination and any necessary investigations, and reaching a provisional diagnosis. Patient records should clearly reflect that the pertinent elements of the patient evaluation have been completed and documented.

In situations where the patient is known to the registrant, and where the registrant has current knowledge of the patient's clinical status from previous encounters, a prescription may be provided on the basis of a more focused clinical evaluation. If the registrant is part of a group practice or a call group, they may choose to accept a previous patient evaluation by an associate as the basis for further prescribing. However, under such circumstances, the prescribing registrant would retain the professional responsibility for the prescription that they have written.

If a medication is prescribed, registrants have a responsibility to advise the patient about such matters as drug effects and interactions, side effects, contraindications, precautions, and any other information pertinent to their use of the medication. There is an obligation for the prescribing registrant to arrange appropriate follow-up, either personally or with the most responsible provider.