



College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia

# Professional Standards and Guidelines

## Sensitive Examinations

### Preamble

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

In order to minimize complaints from patients relating to perceptions of inappropriate sexual conduct:

1. Physicians should be careful to ensure that any remarks or questions that are asked cannot be construed as demeaning, seductive or sexual in nature.
2. When sensitive subjects such as sexual matters have to be discussed, the physician should explain why the questions are being asked, so that the intention cannot be misconstrued.
3. Hugging and kissing a patient is considered high risk behaviour that can be misinterpreted. Any touching that is not part of the physical examination must be of a type that cannot be misconstrued.

### Chaperones

1. Although chaperones are not mandatory, physicians should consider carefully whether a chaperone would contribute to an individual patient's feeling of comfort and security, and whether a chaperone would protect the physician from unfounded allegations. If a patient asks to have someone else in the room, that request for a support person must be honoured. If a staff person is unavailable to chaperone, a support person may suffice in some circumstances.
2. Attendance of a chaperone is strongly recommended for independent medical examinations. Similarly, if the patient is mentally handicapped, subject to delusions or paranoia, exhibits seductive behaviour, exhibits anxiety about a proposed examination (especially if not an adult patient), is a survivor of abuse, or has other emotional or cognitive challenges which may lead to misperception or misinterpretation, it is prudent to have a third person present.
3. Whenever a genital or rectal examination is to be done on a prepubertal child, a parent or other adult known to the child must be in the room.

## Physical Examinations

1. The scope of the examination and the reasons for examination should be explained to the patient.
2. If a patient refuses a part or the whole examination, it should not be done. The refusal should be noted in the chart. It may be possible to reschedule an essential examination to be done in the presence of a chaperone of the patient's choice.
3. A physician must provide complete privacy for a patient to dress and undress.
4. A patient must be provided with an adequate gown or drape.
5. The physician should not assist with removing or replacing the patient's clothing, unless the patient is having difficulty and consents to proffered help.

See also [Independent Medical Examinations](#) and [Sexual Boundaries in the Patient-Physician Relationship](#)

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