

FAQ

Physician Assistants

Background

Recently, College Bylaws were drafted to introduce a framework for licensing and regulation of physician assistants (PA) to respond to the urgent need to resource emergency departments in the province. The below FAQs were developed to address common questions raised during the consultation of the bylaw amendments. This document only addresses questions related to the College Bylaws.

Frequently asked questions

Where will PAs be permitted to practise?

At this time, PAs will only be permitted to practise in emergency departments within health authorities. We anticipate that as more PAs become eligible for registration in BC that PAs may be permitted to work in other clinical settings similar to other provinces.

Do PAs have a scope of practice?

Because PAs are not currently a designated health profession in BC under the *Health Professions Act*, they are recognized as “certified non-registrants” of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. This means that PAs do not have a scope of practice or title protection and all work is to be assigned, supervised, or delegated by the supervising physician. Under the existing legislation, all delegation of restricted activities from a physician must be set out in the Bylaws. Delegation permits the physician assistant to perform a restricted activity.

Is a PA permitted to obtain informed consent for a procedure?

No. The supervising physician must obtain the patient’s informed consent for the restricted activity to be performed, unless it is not possible due to an emergency.

Can PAs complete forms under the *Mental Health Act*, particularly Form 4s?

No. Only physicians licensed for independent practice or nurse practitioners can sign Form 4s. It should be noted that all forms physicians may be asked to complete, such as medical certificates of death, birth certificates and stillbirth certificates, can only be completed by physicians who are licensed for independent practice.

Can PAs be under the supervision of a nurse practitioner?

No. Nurse practitioners cannot supervise a PA. Only a physician licensed for independent practice can act as a supervisor.

What is deemed “delegation”?

Most of the work completed by PAs is under delegation. The term “delegate” in this setting means that a physician can authorize all or part of a restricted activity to be performed by a PA without supervision. Prior to delegating, the supervising physician must have seen the patient and established a treatment plan and then provide, in writing, what exactly is being delegated. The supervising physician must also be confident in the PA’s knowledge, skills, and judgement to perform the delegated act.

The list of activities which can be delegated are found in section 10-3(1) of the College Bylaws.

What is deemed “assigning”?

Any non-restricted activity that may be performed without requiring delegation or authorization under supervision is considered assigning.

Activities which may be assigned to PAs can be found in section 10-2(1) of the College Bylaws.

Will supervising physicians be required to co-sign prescriptions written by PAs?

No. PAs will be assigned their own unique College ID number and will be identified as a prescribing practitioner in the PharmaNet database.

Can PAs refer and/or order tests?

Yes. However, a PA will be required to use the supervising physician’s MSP number and the supervising physician has an ongoing obligation for follow up, etc.

Is virtual or remote supervision permitted?

No. At this time, only on-site supervision is permitted.

What is a “contract of supervision”?

A contract of supervision is a document that must be signed by both the supervising physician(s) and the physician assistant and is filed with the College. It sets out, in greater detail, the clinical responsibilities to be expected of the physician assistant and a list of the specific restricted activities (procedures) that the physician assistant will be expected to perform. This contract will identify a primary supervisor and other supervisors who will be working with the physician assistant. Contracts of supervision may be amended or updated over time if the job description of the employer is updated. A contract of supervision cannot permit the delegation of restricted activities that exceeds what is established in the Bylaws.

Unless otherwise amended, a contract of supervision must be updated on an annual basis.

Can a PA delegate a restricted activity?

No. Physician assistants are not permitted to delegate restricted activities to another provider.

Who determines that a physician assistant is competent to perform restricted activities?

As part of the onboarding process, the supervising physician(s) named in a contract of supervision must sign off that the physician assistant is competent to perform all the duties outlined in their employment contract and the contract of supervision. The satisfactory performance of the physician assistant to complete all of the duties outlined in the job description and contract of supervision must be signed off by the supervising physicians within 30 days of commencement of work by the PA.