



The College of
Physicians and Surgeons
of Newfoundland and Labrador

Practice Guideline: Chaperones & Sensitive Examinations

Practice Guidelines are recommendations developed by the College with which members should be familiar and follow whenever and wherever possible and appropriate.

CHAPERONES & SENSITIVE EXAMINATIONS

Preamble

The performance of sensitive examinations may be necessary for optimal patient outcome. However, for the patient such examinations may be embarrassing, distressing, and/or perceived as culturally inappropriate. Having a chaperone present when conducting sensitive examinations of patients helps to promote patient comfort and ensure the protection of both the patient and physician.

Practice Guidelines

Definitions

“Chaperone” is a health care employee who serves as a witness during a sensitive examination.

“Sensitive examination” includes pelvic, genital, breast and rectal examinations.

Guidelines

To promote patient comfort and security during the completion of sensitive examinations, physicians should adhere to the following guidelines:

Physicians should consider having a chaperone present for all sensitive examinations. If a patient requests to have a chaperone present for a sensitive examination, the physician must comply with this request.

Prior to a sensitive examination, the physician should:

- a) Highlight the scope of the sensitive examination;
- b) Explain why the examination is necessary, what the exam will entail in clear terms inclusive of pain, discomfort, both pre-, intra- and post-examination;

- c) Obtain the patient's informed consent before the examination;
- d) Obtain consent for the presence of chaperone before the chaperone enters;
- e) Introduce the chaperone to the patient;
- f) Note the presence of a chaperone on the medical record of the patient;
- g) Give the patient privacy to undress;
- h) Provide the patient with appropriate attire of gown/drape to prepare for examination;

During a sensitive examination, the physician should:

- a) Stop the examination if the patient so requests;
- b) Explain why any changes to the scope of the examination are necessary and seek permission before proceeding;

Prior to, during and following a sensitive examination, the physician should:

- a) Ensure that any questions/remarks cannot be construed as demeaning, seductive or sexual in nature;
- b) Explain why any questions relating to sexual matters are being asked so the intention is not misconstrued;

The physician should ensure the Chaperone is:

- a) Sensitive and respectful of the patient's dignity, privacy and confidentiality;
- b) Familiar with the procedures involved in the exam;
- c) Present for the entire exam;
- d) Prepared to raise concerns if there is concern about the physician's actions/behaviours

Acknowledgements

College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia (2009). Sensitive Examinations.

General Medical Council (2013). Intimate examinations and chaperones.

Wai, D., Katsaris, M., & Singhal, R. (2008). Chaperones: are we protecting patients?
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