



Standard of Practice:

Closing or Leaving a Medical Practice (2020)

A **Standard of Practice** is the minimum standard of professional behavior and ethical conduct expected by the College on a specific issue.

Closing or Leaving a Medical Practice

Preamble

The College expects a physician to take reasonable measures to ensure their closure of practice or extended leave from practice will not impact on appropriate and continuing care for patients.

Definitions

Closure of practice: the closure of a physician's practice with no intention of reopening it in the same location. Examples include: retirement, moving a significant distance, or a change in scope of practice.

Leave from practice: the closure of a physician's practice for an extended period of time (3 months or longer) with the intention of returning. Examples include: sabbatical leave, maternity/paternity leave, education leave, medical leave, disciplinary action.

Standard of Practice

A physician must take steps to facilitate continuity of care for patients when contemplating a closure of practice or leave from practice. In situations where a physician is suddenly and unexpectedly absent from practice (e.g. illness), the physician should, to the best of their ability and, as soon as it is practical to do so, take reasonable steps to act in accordance with this standard of practice.

Notifying Patients

The College expects a physician to provide notification to patients of a planned closure of practice or leave from practice.

Notice Period

A physician should provide patients with a **minimum** of 90 days' notice of an intended closure of practice or leave from practice.

In circumstances where a successor physician will be in place to take over the practice at the time of the physician's departure (or shortly thereafter), the notice period may be shortened.

In circumstances where a physician is leaving practice unexpectedly (ie. sudden illness, other urgent circumstance, suspension) and it is not possible to provide 90 days' notice, the physician should provide notification at the earliest opportunity.

Method of Notification

Acceptable ways a physician may notify a patient include:

- In person at a clinic visit;
- Letter to the patient;
- Telephone call to the patient; and
- Secure e-mail.

The College recommends documenting how a patient has been notified in the patient's medical record.

Details of Notification

The notification should include the following information:

- Date of the physician's intended departure from practice;
- Name of the successor physician who will assume responsibility for the medical practice (if applicable); and
- The location where patient medical records will be stored and details on how patients can obtain a copy of their records.

Notifying the College

A physician who is closing a practice or contemplating a leave from practice must notify the College by completing the approved form in advance of the closure.

In circumstances where a physician will not continue to hold professional liability coverage following closure of their practice or during a leave from practice, the physician must also notify the College of their intention to relinquish their practising licence.

Notifying Regional Health Authorities, Colleagues

The College recommends that a physician provide notification of a closure of practice or a leave from practice as soon as possible to any Regional Health Authority where the physician holds privileges or other affiliation (e.g. diagnostic and laboratory ordering). The College also recommends that the physician provide notice to any physician colleagues who also provide care to the patients of the physician (e.g. referring physicians). This may include transferring the care of the patient back to the referring physician.

Medical Records

The College expects a physician who permanently closes their medical practice or who takes a leave from practice to make appropriate arrangements for the retention or transfer of patient medical records in a manner which is in accordance with the *Personal Health Information Act* and the College's By-Law: Medical Records.

Where a physician has transferred patient records to another physician or a medical records storage provider, the physician must provide patients with the information necessary to access a copy of their medical records.

Laboratory Tests, Diagnostic Imaging Reports

The College expects a physician who closes their medical practice or takes a leave from practice to take reasonable steps to ensure appropriate follow-up for laboratory results and diagnostic imaging reports ordered by the physician, where the result is pending at the time of the closure of practice.

In circumstances where a physician will not hold a licence to practise medicine following closure of their practice or during a leave from practice, the physician must take steps to communicate with patients that the physician will not be able to review or interpret laboratory and diagnostic imaging results. A physician must also provide notification to applicable Regional Health Authorities in these circumstances.

Acknowledgements

CPSBC (2020) Leaving Practice
CPSM (2020) Closing, Leaving or Moving a Medical Practice
CPSO (2019) Closing a Medical Practice

Document History

Document History		
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