

The College of Physicians & Surgeons is responsible for regulating physicians under the *Health Professions Act*. Included in this role of self-regulation is the obligation to investigate complaints about physicians.

The College approaches complaints about physicians as problems to be solved.

A complaint may provide the opportunity for a physician to change behavior, or to improve some aspect of practice. In some instances, when there is a question of knowledge or skill, assessment and retraining may be required. Our experience is that the best outcome happens when the physician is a willing participant in the complaint process.

Complaints are often misunderstandings or misinterpretations.

A significant number of complaints arise due to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the doctor's actions or instructions. In such cases we try to bridge the gap. We recognize that we may not always be able to save the relationship between the patient and the physician, but we may be able to achieve acknowledgment and apology from the physician.

Formal disciplinary action is taken as a last resort.

In rare cases the College will pursue formal disciplinary action against a physician. Typically this type of approach is reserved for files where information available indicates a very serious offence, but the physician has not acknowledged an error or transgression (and is therefore unwilling to consider a behavioral change, assessment, or retraining), or when the physician is a repeat offender and has failed to act on our direction regarding retraining or behavioral change.

We prefer, when possible, to work with the physician to identify the problem and to work towards a solution. We believe that the chances of long-term success with this approach are much higher than if disciplinary action is taken - action that may, in fact, be counter-productive to creating a positive change in physician behavior.

What you can expect to happen after filing a complaint.

In all cases, we will clarify the issues put forward in a formal complaint and attempt to address them. We will also ask what outcome the complainant desires or expects.

We always hope the outcome of a complaint meets the expectations of the complainant. However, there are times where the complainant wants a much harsher penalty than is warranted, or requests an outcome (e.g. compensation) that is outside our mandate.

In all circumstances where the physician has made an error, the College tries to ensure that such problems will not happen again.

Remember, our goal is to have competent physicians practicing safe medicine for the benefit of the public of Alberta.