

Managing physicians with health concerns

The College's primary responsibility is to ensure Alberta physicians provide safe, quality care to their patients.

An important factor in meeting this responsibility is ensuring physicians do not have health concerns that affect their ability to practise.

Ideally, every physician would have access to a family doctor and would seek appropriate advice when health concerns arise. Unfortunately, as physicians, we often neglect our own health needs, focusing instead on providing services to patients and colleagues. It is surprising how many physicians do not have a family doctor, or how often physicians neglect to seek care when they are depressed or struggling.

The question about *when* a health condition should come to the attention of the College is a difficult one. On the one hand, physicians should be able to access confidential medical care just as any other patient would, without needing to report their information elsewhere. On the other hand, physicians work in a safety-sensitive occupation and make significant decisions about the care of their patients.

Other safety-sensitive occupations require regular medical examinations and ongoing oversight of medical conditions to ensure an individual's health does not affect his or her ability to carry out du-



ties. Medicine does not have that formalized safety net, so the College works with individual physicians to manage their health concerns.

Management of health issues occurs outside the College's disciplinary process and most physicians can return to work with appropriate supports. Restrictions or loss of a licence are extremely rare and occur only if an independent assessment determines the physician is unfit to practise.

Some physicians have expressed concern about the privacy of personal health information provided to the College. Let me assure you this information is confidential with extremely restricted access - it is not available to general College staff or third parties.

Even after clarifying the College's approach, it is understood that some physicians will still experience anxiety when their health issues are brought to the

attention of the College, or will "go underground" and not seek care if required to report the details to the College. To help address some of these concerns, we are sharing our policies in a more public manner. For details on how the College manages physician health conditions, go to www.cpsa.ab.ca/Services/PHMP/Policies.

These policies explain the College's approach for conditions such as blood-borne illnesses and infections, addiction and substance abuse, other medical conditions, boundary violations and disruptive behavior. Although some of these policies are being reviewed to ensure compliance with the *Health Professions Act*, the overall approach will not change.

I welcome your feedback and comments.

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