

Physician health & the College

As part of our mandate to protect the public, the College is responsible for ensuring our members have the capacity to practise safely.

To help meet this responsibility, College Council created the Physician Health Monitoring Committee, comprised of physicians with expertise in physician health. The Committee sets policy and provides advice to guide the College's approach in dealing with physicians who have health concerns.

This is important as health conditions can affect a physician's ability to safely care for patients. Yet some physicians can tend to avoid caring for their own health issues and may not have a family physician.

Unfortunately, physicians also turn a blind eye to colleagues who may be ill or distressed. As a self-regulating profession, physicians must work together to address our health concerns in a fair and compassionate fashion to ensure we are healthy to care for our patients.

The overall philosophy of the Physician Health Monitoring Committee is that physicians with health concerns should be managed outside of the disciplinary process, and that with support and care,



most physicians practice very well despite their health condition.

As part of its work, the Committee has developed approaches to common health conditions, including medical illness such as neurologic disease, addictions, and psychiatric conditions. Over the past 18 years, the vast majority of physicians with these conditions have continued in, or returned to, successful practice.

Despite the fact that physicians with health conditions successfully return to work, regulatory scrutiny is still anxiety provoking for many physicians. As a group, physicians are often self-critical and even a routine letter from the College can create anxiety. This issue became evident when concerns were raised regarding the new health-related questions on the College's 2010 Registration Information Form.

Of the 112 physicians who answered "yes" to the questions:

- 41 had already reported their health conditions to the College
- 47 indicated that they had received or were receiving treatment for conditions such as depression, diabetes, or anxiety.
- 24 disclosed a variety of medical conditions, including blood borne illnesses such as Hepatitis B and C, alcoholism, stroke, brain tumors and depression requiring time off work. The College has followed up with these physicians to ensure they are receiving appropriate medical care and that their health condition has not affected their ability to practise.

For further information about the Physician Health Monitoring Committee, please contact Dr. Janet Wright, Assistant Registrar at jlwright@cpsa.ab.ca.