

# the Messenger

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta

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*April 2005 | issue 117*



College of  
Physicians  
& Surgeons  
of Alberta

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## The Messenger

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# Registrar's Report



Federal Minister of Health Ujjal Dosanjh has been in the media recently expressing his concern about Internet pharmacy prescribing, and his view that regulatory bodies need to be more vigilant in policing the unethical act of co-signing U.S. prescriptions. While the Minister's frustration is understandable, and even shared, his focus on the regulatory authorities as the source of the solution to

what has become a billion dollar cross-border trade is unfortunate and unfair.

Medical regulatory authorities are primarily reactive, and while all have made clear to their regulated members the unprofessional nature of co-signing prescriptions for patients in the absence of a physician/patient relationship, we are only as effective as the information we receive. (More helpful from the Minister would be assistance in removing the privacy excuses proffered by those profiting from the lucrative trade so that we could do our job).

Despite the difficulty, New Brunswick, Ontario, Manitoba, British Columbia and Alberta have all dealt with practitioners who have engaged in counter-signing activity, levying varying levels of penalty. In Alberta, Dr. Omar Rahaman of Calgary has submitted his public written apology contained in this *Messenger*. The publicity and his solemn promise to stop are believed suitable punishment for a first time offender who has been fully co-operative with the

College. Other physicians engaged in the practice should note his words – and be aware that the increasing publicity will no doubt result in increasing intolerance of such behaviour.

On the theme of ethics and professionalism, this *Messenger* includes a promotion for the Provincial Health Ethics Network Annual Conference. The College is proud to contribute to this by sponsoring Dr. Edmund Pellegrino, an octogenarian phenomenon who has made great contributions to the understanding of the virtues-based ethics underpinning the profession of medicine and even defining that profession. Given this College's commitment to ensuring that Albertans benefit from their interactions with caring, competent professionals, our support for Dr. Pellegrino's visit is understandable. I hope many of you will be able to attend.

*Dr. Bob Burns, Registrar*  
[rburns@cpsa.ab.ca](mailto:rburns@cpsa.ab.ca)

## Physician's Letter of Apology

Dear Colleagues: Internet Prescription Co-signing

During late 2003 and through 2004 until November, I countersigned a large number of prescriptions written by U.S. physicians for U.S. patients in order that they could be filled and shipped by a Canadian Internet pharmacy. I ceased this activity immediately on November 15, 2004, when notified by the College that this constituted unprofessional conduct.

I write this to you as per my agreement with the Investigation Chair. I sincerely regret my actions, and wish to ensure that you are all as aware as I of the unethical nature of such countersigning activity. I did not intend to behave unethically, but ignorance of the law is an unacceptable excuse, and I should have known that countersigning was wrong.

I realise that the good standing and reputation of physicians everywhere is

negatively impacted by the unethical behaviour of the few. I, therefore, express my sincere apologies to all my professional colleagues, and to the public, for my behaviour. Finally, I have committed myself to the high ethical standard expected of physicians, and will scrupulously avoid future lapses.

Yours sincerely,  
(original signed by Omar Rahaman, MD)

# 2004 Physician Resource Statistics

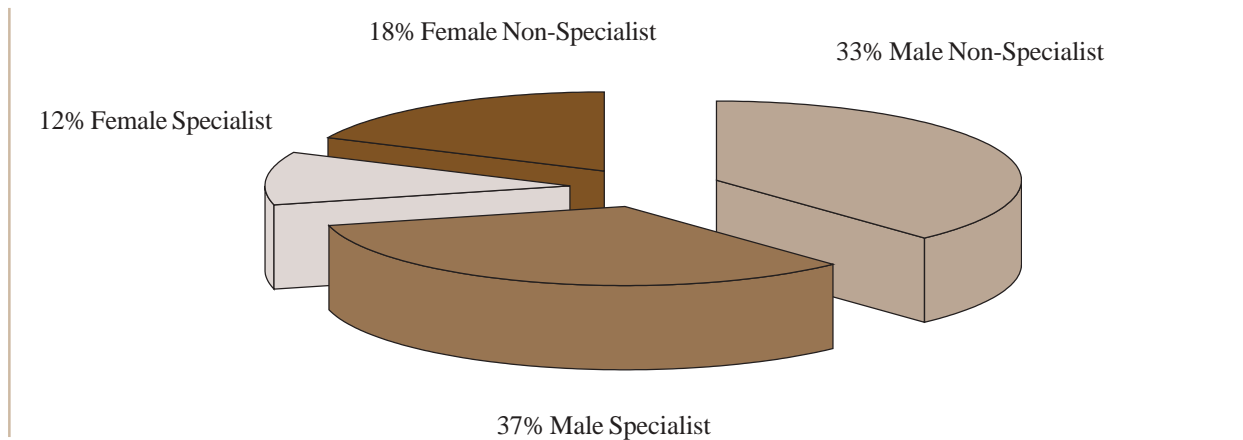
## Registration Information:

|                                                                                                                                                                         | 2004         | 2003         | 2002         | 2001         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| <b>Type of Registration</b>                                                                                                                                             |              |              |              |              |
| Full Register                                                                                                                                                           | 5,494        | 5,323        | 5,196        | 5,012        |
| Special Register                                                                                                                                                        | 590          | 537          | 488          | 431          |
| Temporary Register                                                                                                                                                      | 5            | 8            | 4            | 7            |
| Courtesy Register                                                                                                                                                       | 1            | 1            | 1            | 1            |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                                                                                                            | <b>6,090</b> | <b>5,869</b> | <b>5,689</b> | <b>5,451</b> |
| <b>Sex</b>                                                                                                                                                              |              |              |              |              |
| Female                                                                                                                                                                  | 1,811        | 1,725        | 1,649        | 1,541        |
| Male                                                                                                                                                                    | 4,279        | 4,144        | 4,040        | 3,910        |
| <b>Specialist/Non-Specialist</b>                                                                                                                                        |              |              |              |              |
| Specialist                                                                                                                                                              | 3,015        | 2,885        | 2,807        | 2,667        |
| Non-Specialist                                                                                                                                                          | 3,075        | 2,984        | 2,882        | 2,784        |
| <b>Location</b>                                                                                                                                                         |              |              |              |              |
| <i>* 2003/2004 statistics are not compared to previous years due to boundary changes that occurred April 1, 2003 which combined Alberta's 17 health regions into 9.</i> |              |              |              |              |
| RHA 1 Chinook                                                                                                                                                           | 225          | 225          |              |              |
| RHA 2 Palliser                                                                                                                                                          | 124          | 116          |              |              |
| RHA 3 Calgary                                                                                                                                                           | 2,482        | 2,358        |              |              |
| RHA 4 David Thompson                                                                                                                                                    | 365          | 364          |              |              |
| RHA 5 East Central                                                                                                                                                      | 106          | 106          |              |              |
| RHA 6 Capital                                                                                                                                                           | 2,410        | 2,331        |              |              |
| RHA 7 Aspen                                                                                                                                                             | 169          | 165          |              |              |
| RHA 8 Peace                                                                                                                                                             | 142          | 139          |              |              |
| RHA 9 Northern Lights                                                                                                                                                   | 54           | 53           |              |              |
| Location Unknown                                                                                                                                                        | 13           | 12           |              |              |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                                                                                                            | <b>6,090</b> | <b>5,869</b> | <b>5,689</b> | <b>5,451</b> |
| <b>Other Registrants</b>                                                                                                                                                |              |              |              |              |
| Full Register, out of province                                                                                                                                          | 416          | 416          | 442          | 464          |
| Educational Register                                                                                                                                                    | 1,574        | 1,511        | 1,455        | 1,399        |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                                                                                                            | <b>1,990</b> | <b>1,927</b> | <b>1,897</b> | <b>1,863</b> |
| <b>Grand Total, All Registrants</b>                                                                                                                                     | <b>8,080</b> | <b>7,796</b> | <b>7,586</b> | <b>7,314</b> |
| <b>Retired</b>                                                                                                                                                          |              |              |              |              |
| Retired, in Alberta                                                                                                                                                     | 474          | 459          | 453          | 454          |
| Retired, out of province                                                                                                                                                | 123          | 126          | 115          | 96           |
| <b>Total</b>                                                                                                                                                            | <b>597</b>   | <b>585</b>   | <b>568</b>   | <b>550</b>   |

## Changes in Physician Workforce:

|                                    | 2004        | 2003        | 2002        | 2001        |
|------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Increases</b>                   |             |             |             |             |
| New Registrants                    |             |             |             |             |
| University of Alberta              | 85          | 63          | 60          | 80          |
| University of Calgary              | 29          | 43          | 36          | 37          |
| Other Canadian Universities        | 122         | 131         | 148         | 162         |
| USA                                | 2           | 0           | 3           | 4           |
| Other                              | 121         | 137         | 131         | 106         |
| Restored to Register               | 82          | 52          | 51          | 46          |
| Returned to Province               | 41          | 40          | 30          | 24          |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>482</b>  | <b>466</b>  | <b>459</b>  | <b>459</b>  |
| <b>Decreases</b>                   |             |             |             |             |
| Left Alberta                       | -89         | -103        | -91         | -103        |
| Retired                            | -42         | -33         | -29         | -31         |
| Voluntary Erasure                  | -50         | -57         | -23         | -50         |
| Removed from the Register          | -55         | -66         | -56         | -49         |
| Deceased                           | -9          | -9          | -11         | -13         |
| <b>Total</b>                       | <b>-245</b> | <b>-268</b> | <b>-210</b> | <b>-246</b> |
| <b>Net change during each year</b> | <b>237</b>  | <b>198</b>  | <b>249</b>  | <b>213</b>  |

## Workforce Breakdown:



# 2004 Complaint Statistics

There were 681 complaints lodged against Alberta physicians last year, an increase of 88 complaints over 2003 statistics, but a number consistent with the previous three years.

Complaint volumes are affected by a variety of factors including patient expectations, high profile events related to patient care, public awareness of the College's complaints process, and overall changes in the health care system. With approximately 7500 active physicians treating hundreds of patients every year, the percentage of complaints versus physician/patient interactions is minimal. However, there is always room to improve.

With that in mind, the College's complaints resolution process is focused on quality improvement. Complaints are looked at as problems to be solved. Sometimes complaints are a matter of patients being unhappy with their situation and they want their physician to know their expectations were not met. Although some complaints may be unsubstantiated, there are very few that don't offer a learning/growth opportunity for the physician.

In 2004, more than 10,000 phone calls were fielded by the CPSA complaints department. Inquiries included how to file a complaint, how to access medical records and the discipline history on a particular physician. (Note: the College does not share information regarding patient complaints against physicians. However, if a physician is involved in a formal disciplinary hearing, the results of the hearing are published in

*The Messenger* newsletter and posted on the CPSA website. A physician's name is only published when ordered by Council.)

Once a complaint is received by the College in writing, it goes through a standard review process. College staff members follow up with the complainant to clarify the issues and the desired outcome. The physician is then contacted in writing and asked for a written response to the complaint.

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**The percentage of complaints versus physician/patient interactions is minimal. However, there is always room to improve.**

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The vast majority of complaints are resolved by the College using an informal dispute resolution process. This can include extensive negotiation with both parties, interviews with other physicians or health care providers involved in the situation, collection of expert opinion or other research. As a result of this process, one of the following actions may be taken:

- The file is closed with no further action.
- There is written advice/direction to the physician from the College.
- The physician voluntarily makes changes in his/her practice.
- The physician writes an apology to the patient.
- The physician agrees to undergo a peer assessment.

- The physician agrees to take additional training.
- The physician agrees to restrict his/her practice in some way.

If the complaint cannot be resolved through an informal process, a formal disciplinary hearing is held. In 2004, there were no disciplinary hearings held. Although this statistic is unusual, the number of hearings is traditionally very low, with less than five each year for the previous several years.

Almost half (45%) of the complaints submitted to the College of Physicians & Surgeons are categorized as *Quality of Care* issues. This could mean an incorrect or delay in diagnosis or treatment, procedural or counseling concerns, inappropriate or delayed referrals to specialists or concerns related to physician follow-up. The next most common type of complaint (29%) falls into the category of *Practice Management* and would include issues such as physician availability, office management and communication. *Quality of Care* and *Practice Management* have traditionally been the two most common categories for physician related complaints.

A full report of the College's 2004 complaints statistics is available on the CPSA website at [http://www.cpsa.ab.ca/complaints/complaint\\_statistics.asp](http://www.cpsa.ab.ca/complaints/complaint_statistics.asp).

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*2004 Complaint Statistics cont...*

## Number of Physicians vs Complaint Statistics & Average Days to Close of Complaint

### Total Complaints per Year

| Year | Number of complaints |
|------|----------------------|
| 2004 | 681                  |
| 2003 | 593                  |
| 2002 | 698                  |
| 2001 | 717                  |
| 2000 | 660                  |
| 1999 | 601                  |
| 1998 | 771                  |

| Totals                                | 2004 | 2003 | 2002 | 2001 |
|---------------------------------------|------|------|------|------|
| Number of complaints received         | 681  | 593  | 698  | 717  |
| Number of physicians complained about | 578  | 500  | 578  | 615  |
| Complaints open at end of year        | 294  | 220  | 251  | 246  |
| Average days to close of complaint    |      |      |      |      |
| • up to 4 months                      | 58%  | 69%  | 73%  | 73%  |
| • 4-12 months                         | 38%  | 26%  | 22%  | 23%  |
| • more than 12 months                 | 4%   | 5%   | 5%   | 4%   |

### Summary of Complaint Natures

| Nature              | Number of complaints |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| Quality of Care     | 389                  |
| Practice Management | 248                  |
| Medical Reporting   | 125                  |
| Third Party         | 34                   |
| Ethics              | 48                   |
| Systemic            | 13                   |
| Unclassified        | 1                    |
| TOTAL               | 858*                 |

Quality of Care: diagnosis-incorrect or delayed, treatment-prescribing, procedural and counseling, referral/consultations, follow-up.

Practice Management: physician availability, office management including finance, and communication

Medical Reporting: release of records, report completion and accuracy

Third Party: Independent Medical Examination, (WCB, and Non-WCB, all others)

Ethics: confidentiality, informed consent, advertising/self promotion, research related, and boundary violations including sexual, financial and other.

Systemic: access to human resources and technology, continuity of care and interdisciplinary issues.

Unclassified: all others.

\* Complaints may be assigned more than one nature.

## How will the Complaint Process be different under HPA?

The medical profession will soon move from under the authority of the *Medical Profession Act* to the *Health Professions Act* – a new omnibus legislation for all health professionals. When the College begins to operate under the *HPA*, some major changes will be made to the complaints process. This includes an informal resolution process that involves the complainant.

Presently, a physician may agree to make changes in his/her practice as

a result of a complaint. This is communicated to the complainant in writing and sometimes in a meeting with CPSA staff. Under the *HPA*, a similar agreement would be part of a mediated process involving the physician, the College and the complainant. This agreement must then be ratified by the Complaints Review Committee.

The ratified settlement may be published with information

concerning the complaint and the agreement. The identity of the physician and/or the complainant is revealed only if authorized by the ratified settlement.

For more information, please contact Ms. Sharon Barron, Manager of Complaints, via e-mail at [sbarron@cpsa.ab.ca](mailto:sbarron@cpsa.ab.ca); or by telephone at (780)970-6206 or 1-800-561-3899.

# 2005 Medical Directory

The College's 2005 Medical Directory will be mailed out to all physicians during the month of April.

Physicians who do not receive their one complimentary copy of the Directory should contact Ms. Karen Graves at (780) 970-6216, 1-800-561-3899 ext. 216, or [kgraves@cpsa.ab.ca](mailto:kgraves@cpsa.ab.ca).

**Please allow Canada Post until April 30, 2005 to deliver your hard copy of the Medical Directory before contacting the College.**

If physicians require additional copies, or if other parties are interested in obtaining the 2005 Medical Directory, it may be

purchased based on the following 2005 rates.

**Delivered within Edmonton (each)**

|           |                |
|-----------|----------------|
| Directory | \$75.00        |
| Delivery  | 5.00           |
| GST       | <u>5.60</u>    |
| Total     | <b>\$85.60</b> |

**Delivered outside Edmonton (each)**

|           |                |
|-----------|----------------|
| Directory | \$75.00        |
| Delivery  | 8.00           |
| GST       | <u>5.81</u>    |
| Total     | <b>\$88.81</b> |

**Picked-up at the CPSA Office (each)**

|           |                |
|-----------|----------------|
| Directory | \$75.00        |
| GST       | <u>5.25</u>    |
| Total     | <b>\$80.25</b> |

Directories will be delivered to your 'College Mail' address. Allow until April 30, 2005 to receive your copy before contacting the College.

To place an order, complete the 2005 Medical Directory Order Form available on our website ([http://www.cpsa.ab.ca/findaphysician/purchase\\_md.asp](http://www.cpsa.ab.ca/findaphysician/purchase_md.asp)) or submit the form located in the back of your 2004 Medical Directory (page 277). Pre-payment is required by cheque, VISA or MasterCard prior to shipping any directories.

## Verbal Prescription Forgeries

The Alberta College of Pharmacists has reported a significant increase in verbal forgeries throughout the province.

Individuals will call pharmacies with prescription orders, claiming to be a physician. They will often be able to provide the physician's College licence number, office address, and telephone number.

Prevention of forgeries and fraud should be a concern for all physicians prescribing narcotics and other controlled drugs. The following are suggestions to prevent verbal forgeries of prescriptions:

- Limit the use of verbal prescriptions to exceptional cases.
- Do not use verbal prescriptions for medications that are prone to misuse or abuse such as benzodiazepines or acetaminophen with codeine compounds.
- Fax prescriptions to the patient's choice of pharmacy.
- Limit the quantities of prescriptions where possible for medications prone to abuse.
- Be accessible to pharmacists who require verification and authentication of prescriptions. It is not recommended that office staff

verify prescriptions for narcotics and controlled substances.

- Protect your College registration number and only provide it when necessary for legitimate purposes.

Verbal prescription forgeries may be the most difficult forgery to detect and prevent. Using these general approaches to prescribing will assist the pharmacist in identifying a potential forgery when it is not the physician's customary practice to provide verbal prescriptions.

*Ms. Cathy McCann, Manager  
Physician Prescribing Practices*

# 2005 Medical Centennial Update

Alberta's centennial is an opportunity to reflect on the numerous achievements over the past 100 years. For the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Alberta Medical Association, it is our opportunity to celebrate the establishment of our two organizations, and the thousands of physicians who have contributed to the health and well being of Albertans throughout the last century.

In celebration of the milestones and achievements of the medical profession in Alberta, 100 **Physicians of the Century** will

be recognized for their accomplishments over the past 100 years. Physicians will be recognized for contributions in the areas of business, community involvement, arts and culture, sports and leisure, research, education, agriculture, faith/religion, politics, volunteerism and medical practice.

The purpose of the **Physicians of the Century** program is not only to recognize physicians who have made extraordinary achievements to Alberta medicine but also to recognize the breadth of contributions physicians have made in the day-to-day lives of Albertans in communities large and small. This program will recognize 100 physicians who best represent the spectrum of achievement in medicine and beyond.

The Physicians of the Century Selection Panel, chaired by Dr. Clayne Steed, consists of 14 respected physicians and members of the public. The panel will determine the final 100 **Physicians of the Century** based on merit and accomplishment, benefit and service to the profession and/or the community served.

To nominate an Alberta physician, please provide a detailed summary, in no more than three pages, outlining the achievement or contribution, the period of achievement and any supporting anecdotes or stories. Nominations can be made online at [www.medicine100.ab.ca](http://www.medicine100.ab.ca), or by contacting the AMA or CPSA. Nominations should be received prior to May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2005.

## Mary Percy Jackson Announced as First of 100 Physicians of the Century

On Thursday, February 3rd, the Physicians of the Century Selection Panel named Mary Percy Jackson as the first of 100 recipients of the Physicians of the Century program in joint news conferences in Edmonton and Calgary.

"Dr. Jackson was named as one of the 100 Physicians of the Century to kick off the Centennial of Organized Medicine celebrations", said Dr. Clayne Steed, Chair of the Physicians of the Century Selection Panel. "The committee felt it was fitting to use Dr. Jackson as a tribute to the thousands of physicians who have practised in Alberta."

"Dr. Jackson was a pioneer in every sense of the word", said Steed. "She provided patient care to Alberta's northern communities, spanning more than 300 square miles... on horseback. Her commitment to her patients, to her community and the profession was just as revered 80 years ago as it is today".

"There are hundreds of stories such as Dr. Jackson's," said Dr. David Bond, Chair of the Centennial Steering Committee. "It's important to emphasize that physicians not only practise medicine, but they are integral to many aspects of community life."

# Letters to the Editor

## Provincial Health Ethics Network (PHEN) Conference

PHEN is pleased to announce its upcoming conference, "For Goodness Sake: Being a Virtuous Health Care Provider in Challenging Times", taking place on May 9, 2005. The conference will examine what it means to be a good health care provider in the moral sense. It will attempt to re-focus attention on the core values and virtues of the health professions, particularly in the midst of economic, social, political and other challenges that often conspire to make it difficult to act ethically.

Co-sponsored by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta and the Alberta Association of Registered

Nurses, the conference will examine how one can act virtuously in the modern health care environment, and how one deals with the moral distress inevitably resulting from the gap between ideal and reality.

This conference has been approved as an Accredited Group Learning Activity under Section 1 of the Framework of CPD Options for the MOC Program of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

For more information and to register please see the enclosed brochure, visit [www.phen.ab.ca](http://www.phen.ab.ca), or phone 1.800.472.4066.

*Al-Noor Nenshi Nathoo  
The Provincial Health Ethics Network*

For Goodness Sake: Being a  
Virtuous Health Care Provider in  
Challenging Times

A PHEN conference in conjunction  
with the CPSA and AARN

Monday, May 9, 2005  
Red Deer Lodge Hotel and  
Conference Centre  
9:00 am – 4:30 pm

## Directory of Senior Services 2005

The Directory of Senior Services 2005 is now available for distribution.

With over 300 senior-serving agencies included in the Directory, physicians with older patients can use it as a resource to assist their patients in finding appropriate services in Edmonton.

Directory topics include:

- pensions and finances
- senior centre activities and programs
- help in the home
- counselling

- legal resources and estate planning
- health-related organizations including the Capital Health resources and facilities
- outreach programs
- ethnic organizations
- what to do when a senior dies
- who to contact in other provinces or the United States, and much more.

The Directory is a free publication from the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired. We encourage physicians to order multiple copies for distribution to your patients and their families. Copies are available for pick-up at 15 Sir Winston Churchill Square,

Edmonton, or by contacting Dianne Bateman at 423-5510 ext. 332 or e-mail [dbateman@srsr-seniors.com](mailto:dbateman@srsr-seniors.com).

*Dianne Bateman  
Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired  
Edmonton*

Do you have a message for the  
profession?

Mail or fax letters to the CPSA  
Communications Department, or  
e-mail [info@cpsa.ab.ca](mailto:info@cpsa.ab.ca).

All letters are subject to editing.

# CPSA Staff Contact Listing

## General Switchboard Telephone Numbers

|                                            |                                         |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Main Switchboard: (780) 423-4764           | Confidential Complaints: 1-800-661-4689 |
| Public (General Inquiries): 1-800-561-3899 | Physician Only Line: 1-800-320-8624     |

| Executive:                                                                                                                                                              | Direct Phone   | E-Mail                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------|
| <b>Dr. Bob Burns, Registrar</b>                                                                                                                                         | (780) 970-6224 | rburns@cpsa.ab.ca      |
| <b>Dr. Paul Flynnne, Assistant Registrar</b><br><i>Responsible for TPP Program, Ethics, Impaired Physicians</i>                                                         | (780) 970-6240 | pflynnne@cpsa.ab.ca    |
| <b>Dr. Karen Mazurek, Assistant Registrar</b><br><i>Responsible for Complaints</i>                                                                                      | (780) 412-2677 | kmazurek@cpsa.ab.ca    |
| <b>Dr. Kate Reed, Assistant Registrar</b><br><i>Responsible for Registration &amp; Complaints</i>                                                                       | (780) 970-6203 | kreed@cpsa.ab.ca       |
| <b>Mr. John Swiniarski, Assistant Registrar</b><br><i>Responsible for Staff, Operations/Finance, Communications, PAR Program, IM/IT</i>                                 | (780) 970-6226 | jswiniarski@cpsa.ab.ca |
| <b>Dr. Bryan Ward, Assistant Registrar</b><br><i>Responsible for Standards of Practice, Peer Review, Accreditation Programs, PAR Program, Rural Facility Privileges</i> | (780) 970-6230 | bward@cpsa.ab.ca       |

| Communications Department:               | Direct Phone   | E-Mail             |
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