

# CPSA Code of Conduct

*Expectations of Professionalism for Alberta physicians*

## Introduction

Integrity, trustworthiness, compassion and ethical conduct underpins the practise of medicine. Patients, co-workers, residents and students expect professional behavior from physicians, and this behavior has an enormous impact on how health care is delivered and received.

The vast majority of physicians act professionally, and research shows this behavior translates to a healthier workplace and good patient outcomes. Alternatively, inappropriate physician behavior can contribute to a number of issues in the health care environment, including:

- (a) Negative effect on patient safety and quality of care
- (b) Erosion of relationships with staff, patients, learners, families
- (c) Difficulty recruiting and retaining staff
- (d) Reduced work attendance by co-workers, colleagues
- (e) Direct impact on a physician's health and/or reputation

In order to address these issues, expectations of physicians must be clear.

The CPSA Code of Conduct was developed in response to requests from physicians for clarity and advice about professional behavior. It was written in consultation with physicians, other health care providers, health care organizations, regulatory bodies and post secondary institutions.

The Code of Conduct is intended to:

- Support a culture that values professionalism, integrity, honesty, fairness and collegiality, and that aids and encourages effective care of patients.
- Promote an optimally caring environment of quality and safety for the health and well-being of patients and families, physicians, nurses and other health care workers, learners and teachers, and others in the health care workplace.
- Help physicians meet the principles outlined in the *CMA Code of Ethics* and the *CPSA Standards of Practice*
- Help physicians model professional behavior and teach their younger colleagues.
- Encourage open and respectful discussion related to the delivery of health care.
- Support physicians and others to address physician behavior that does not meet their expectations.

## Use of the Code

The Code of Conduct clarifies the College's expectations for Alberta's physicians in all stages of their careers, in all facets of medicine, and in all methods of care delivery.

It is consistent with the Canadian Medical Association's *Code of Ethics* and complements the CPSA's *Standards of Practice*. Physicians are expected to know and abide by these rules; any breach of professional behavior will be judged against all three of these foundation documents.

While the Code outlines expectations regarding professional behavior, the College will consider the following when inappropriate behavior occurs:

- The well-being of the physician must be addressed
- Systemic issues within the health care system. NOTE: Although these stressors must be identified and considered, they **cannot** be used as an excuse for inappropriate behavior.

## General Principles

The CPSA Code of Conduct is based on the following ethical and professional principles:

- Strive for high-quality patient care
- Focus on safety
- Treat others with respect
- Maintain confidentiality
- Do the right things for the right reasons
- Be aware of your professional and ethical responsibilities
- Be collaborative
- Take action when inappropriate behavior occurs
- Communicate clearly

## Specific Expectations

### Accountability

*As a physician, I will:*

- (a) Act, speak, and otherwise behave in the health care workplace in a way that promotes safety, high quality patient care and effective collaboration with others in the health care team.
- (b) Maintain high standards of personal and professional honesty and integrity.
- (c) Take responsibility for my own behavior and ethical conduct regardless of the circumstances.
- (d) Be accountable for my personal decisions, actions or non-actions in the workplace.
- (e) Record and report accurately and in a timely fashion clinical information (history, physical findings, and test results), research results, assessments and evaluations.
- (f) Communicate with integrity and compassion.
- (g) Accurately attribute ideas developed with others and credit work done by others.

- (h) Deal with conflicts of interest, real or perceived, openly and honestly.
- (i) Engage in lifelong learning.

### **Confidentiality**

*As a physician, I will:*

- (a) Regard the confidentiality and privacy of patients, research participants, and educational participants as well as their associated health records as a primary obligation.
- (b) Ensure confidentiality by limiting discussion of patient health issues to settings appropriate for clinical or educational purposes, and to caregivers within the 'circle of care'. Discussion with others should occur only with explicit patient consent or as permitted by legal and ethical principles.
- (c) Know and comply with applicable legislation regarding confidentiality and health information.

### **Respect for Others**

*As a physician, I will:*

- (a) Interact with patients and families, visitors, employees, physicians, volunteers, health care providers and any others with courtesy, honesty, respect, and dignity.
- (b) Refrain from conduct that may reasonably be considered offensive to others or disruptive to the workplace or patient care. Such conduct may be written, oral, or behavioral, including inappropriate words and/or inappropriate actions or inactions.
- (c) Respect patient autonomy at all times by appropriate discussion of investigation and treatment options with the competent patient and, only with consent, identified other persons.
- (d) Ensure appropriate consultation occurs when a patient lacks the capacity to make treatment decisions, save for emergency circumstances.
- (e) Respect the personal boundaries of patients, including, but not limited to, refraining from physical contact outside the proper role of a physician, including sexual or romantic overtures.
- (f) Respect the personal boundaries of co-workers and their rights to privacy and confidentiality in the same manner as I would patients. Avoid unwanted physical contact, including sexual or romantic overtures.
- (g) Avoid discrimination based on, but not limited to, age, gender, medical condition, race, colour, ancestry, national or ethnic origin, appearance, political belief, religion, marital or family status, physical or mental disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. (NOTE: In human rights legislation, this is known as protected grounds.)
- (h) Allow colleagues to disagree respectfully without fear of punishment, reprisal, or retribution.
- (i) Recognize the important contributions of colleagues, whether generalist or specialist

## **Responsible Behavior**

*As a physician, I will:*

- (a) Ensure that patient care and safety assume the highest priority in the clinical setting. The duty of physicians to advocate for patients does not excuse or justify unacceptable behavior; it must be done constructively.
- (b) Attend to my personal health and well-being to enable attendance to professional responsibilities.
- (c) Recognize my own limitations and seek consultation or help when personal knowledge, skills, or physical/mental status is inadequate or compromised.
- (d) Supervise and assist others appropriate to their need and level of expertise.
- (e) Participate in quality improvement initiatives and strategies to deal with errors, adverse events, close calls, and disclosure.
- (f) Express my opinions on health care matters in a manner respectful of others' views and the individuals expressing those views.
- (g) Abstain, when conducting my professional activities, from exploitation of others for emotional, financial, research, educational, or sexual purposes.
- (h) Teach and model the concepts of professional behavior in research, clinical practice and educational encounters.
- (i) Encourage and model language, appearance, and demeanor appropriate to the professional health care setting.
- (j) Avoid misuse of alcohol or drugs that could impair my ability to care safely for a patient.
- (k) Attend to other factors that could impair my ability to provide safe care to my patients.
- (l) Address breaches of professional or scientific conduct or unskilled practice by a health care professional by discussion directly with that person or, if necessary, by reporting to the appropriate authorities or through established procedures. Respect the need to avoid unjustly discrediting the health care system or the reputation of other members of the health care, research or academic team by trivial or vexatious reports.
- (m) Know and adhere to the *CPSA Standards of Practice*
- (n) Participate in professional development and assessment processes.
- (o) Respect the authority of the law and understand my professional and ethical obligations.

## **Acknowledgement**

*This document was developed with input from various health professions and using codes of conduct from other institutions and organizations. Particularly helpful were statements from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the University of Calgary Faculty of Medicine, the University of Alberta Office of Equity and Faculty Development, and the Medical Council of Canada.*

April 2010