

# What to Expect During Medical Encounters



The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) is the organization that is responsible for licensing medical doctors and making sure your doctor is following the rules, and takes care of you in an ethical, professional and safe manner. While the vast majority of doctors do act appropriately, you can always contact the CPSO if you aren't sure whether something your doctor said or did was okay. In this document, we summarize existing responsibilities that doctors have when treating you. These responsibilities are found in existing CPSO documents<sup>1</sup> and hyperlinks to relevant policies are included below. We also identify things you are entitled to as a patient, so that you have a good understanding about what to expect during medical encounters and you can take an active role in your health-care.

## 1) GENERAL

You can expect that your doctor will fulfill these general responsibilities.

### YOUR DOCTOR WILL:

- Always act in your best interests.
- Have the medical knowledge and clinical skills necessary to provide you with the highest possible quality of health-care in accordance with the standard of care.
- Only recommend or do things that will personally benefit you.
- Treat you with dignity, courtesy and respect, and without discrimination.
- Ensure their medical office is clean and that they comply with all applicable rules and responsibilities in terms of infection control and prevention, as well as making the office accessible.<sup>2</sup>
- Always get your consent to start or stop treatment, unless it is an emergency and certain requirements are met.
- Respect your right to make decisions about whether you want to start or stop treatment your doctor recommends, including any decisions to delay or refuse treatment.
- Protect the privacy and confidentiality of your personal health information.
- Keep comprehensive and accurate records of the care provided.

### YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- Make your own decisions about your health and whether you want to start, stop, delay or refuse treatment your doctor recommends, even if your doctor doesn't agree with your decisions.
- Ask your doctor questions and ask him or her to explain things you don't understand.
- Limit who sees your personal health information.
- Request a copy of your medical records.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For example, the Practice Guide, Maintaining Appropriate Boundaries and Preventing Sexual Abuse policy, Boundaries Self-Assessment Tool, and Safe and Effective Office-Based Practices.

<sup>2</sup> When doctors work in hospitals or clinics, they may not have direct control over their office environment. In these situations, doctors are expected to take reasonable steps to raise any concerns they have about their office environment with the appropriate person, such as an administrator.

<sup>3</sup> Please note that your doctor may charge you a fee for a copy of your medical records. If you have any concerns about the accuracy of the information in your medical record, you have the right to request a correction.

## 2) COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

You can expect that your doctor will communicate and collaborate with you effectively, and it is in your best interest to actively participate in your health-care by communicating effectively and collaborating with your doctor and other health-care providers. In order to do so, the professional relationship you have with your health-care team must be built on mutual trust, respect and honesty, and openly sharing information that is relevant to your health-care.

### YOUR DOCTOR WILL:

- Tell you who they are, and how they will be involved in your health-care.
- Ensure that any medical students or trainees involved in your health-care tell you who they are, and how they will be involved in your health-care.
- Communicate clearly, openly, honestly and with sensitivity.
- Communicate with you in a professional manner (e.g. they will not make sexualized comments about your body or clothing, will not criticize your sexual preference, etc.).
- Work with you to understand your health-care needs and help determine the best course of treatment for you by asking you questions about your health, health-care concerns and other aspects of your health-care.
- Give you information about all available or appropriate treatment options, even if those options may be contrary to their personal beliefs.
- Address any questions or concerns you may have about your health or treatment options.
- Be satisfied that you understand the information they provide you about your health or treatment options.
- Work with other health-care providers (e.g. nurse, pharmacist, etc.) who are involved in your care.
- Help you ask for the health-care resources you need (e.g. community resources).

### YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- Know who is involved in your health-care.
- Ask your doctor questions about your health and treatment options, and express any concerns you may have.
- Ask for a second opinion about your health and treatment options if you are not comfortable making a decision or if you want a perspective from another doctor before you make a decision.

## 3) PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP

You can expect that your doctor will have a strictly professional relationship with you, and will not form a personal or romantic relationship with you or any other patients. This is the only way your doctor can be objective when treating you, which is necessary to ensure you receive the best quality health-care possible.

### YOUR DOCTOR WILL:

- Only have a professional relationship with you that is focused on providing you with safe, high quality health-care.
- Not mix any personal relationships with professional relationships by: asking you for personal favours, telling you inappropriate personal details such as details about their own sexuality or sexual activities, or treating you in a non-clinical context (e.g. grocery store or social event), etc.
- Not ask you for money or loan you money with interest, or get involved in business deals with you.
- Not judge you based on your race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion or creed, sex, sexual orientation, sexual preference, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status or disability.
- Never have **any** sexual involvement with you (sexual intercourse or other forms of physical sexual relations, touching of a sexual nature, or behaviour or remarks of a sexual nature), as it would be sexual abuse.

### YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- Obtain health-care from a doctor who will treat you in a professional and objective way.
- Trust that your doctor will have a strictly professional relationship with you.
- Question anything your doctor says or does that seems unprofessional or inappropriate (e.g. personal, sexual, intimate, etc.).

## 4) PHYSICAL EXAMINATIONS AND PROCEDURES

Your doctor will often need to do physical examinations or procedures to check your overall health, or to investigate or treat health-care concerns. You can expect that your doctor will conduct physical examinations and procedures in an appropriate, respectful and professional manner.

### YOUR DOCTOR WILL:

- Obtain your consent to do a physical examination or procedure. This includes clearly explaining the reasons for any physical examination or procedure, and what the examination or procedure will involve.
- Answer any questions you have about the reasons for a physical examination or procedure.
- Give you privacy to dress or undress when it is required for physical examinations or procedures.
- Provide you with a gown or cloth to drape yourself if you have to undress for physical examinations or procedures and only expose the areas the doctor needs to examine or treat.
- Only touch your breasts and/or genitals when medically necessary.
- Use gloves when performing medically necessary genital examinations.
- Allow a third party to be present during the examination or procedure, where appropriate, if you want one.
- Stop the examination or procedure if you don't want to continue.
- Not ask or make comments about your sexual history, behaviour or performance, unless it is related to your overall health or the care being provided.

### YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- Ask questions about the reasons for the physical examination or procedure if you are unsure about why your doctor has recommended it.
- Ask to have a third party present.
- Ask your doctor to stop the examination or procedure if you don't want to continue.
- Talk to someone about an experience you had that made you feel uncomfortable. Call the CPSO to speak to our support person who is trained and experienced in helping patients who've been sexually abused at 1-800-268-7096 ext. 629.

## The CPSO is here for patients. This is how we can help you...

- Look up your doctor on the CPSO's Public Register to find out information about them, such as what medical school they went to, and what area of medicine they have specialized in.
- Look up the responsibilities doctors have to you on the CPSO's Policies & Publications webpage.
- Find more information about sexual abuse and the support available to patients by looking at the CPSO's Sexual Abuse Complaints webpage or by calling us at 1-800-268-7096 ext. 629.
- If you had an experience that made you feel uncomfortable, call our support person who is trained and experienced in helping patients who've been sexually abused at 1-800-268-7096 ext. 629.
- If you have been sexually abused by your doctor, you may be eligible for funding for therapy and counselling. You can find more information on the CPSO's Information about Funding for Therapy and Counselling webpage or by calling 1-800-268-7096 ext. 211.
- Contact us to ask questions, raise concerns and/or complain about your doctor. You can reach us at 1-800-268-7096 or [feedback@cpsy.on.ca](mailto:feedback@cpsy.on.ca).