



# Closing or Taking Leave From a Medical Practice

## Frequently Asked Questions

This companion document is intended to provide physicians with general advice to support their understanding of the expectations set out in a College Standard of Practice.

This document may be edited or updated for clarity at any time. Please refer to the document regularly to ensure you are aware of the most recent advice.

### **I am moving my clinic to a new location. Is this considered a closure of practice?**

If you expect that patients will follow you to the new location, it would not be considered a closure of practice. However, you are expected to communicate to your patients at your earliest opportunity that you are relocating your practice, the address of your relocation as well as the date of the relocation. If your move is one where patients would not reasonably be expected to follow you, you must comply with this Standard of Practice.

### **I provide locum coverage for other physicians. Am I closing a practice when I finish the locum?**

If the practice remains open when your locum is finished, it is not considered a closure of practice.

### **I do not provide patient care as part of my practice (e.g., administrative medicine). Do I still have to comply with this Standard of Practice?**

You must comply with the parts of the Standard of Practice that apply to your practice. This will include, at a minimum, notifying the College of your intended closure of or leave from practice and your updated contact information. Complete the [Notification of Closure or Leave Form](#) on our website and submit it to the College.

### **I am discontinuing my practice of medicine, but the clinic where I am practicing will remain open. Is this considered a closure of practice?**

Yes, you are still considered to be closing your practice and are expected to comply with all applicable parts of the Standard of Practice. If another healthcare provider will be taking over the care of your patients when you leave (or shortly thereafter) you do not need to provide 90 days' notice to your patients. You should, however, communicate with patients about your intended departure and the arrangement you have made with the successor healthcare provider.

### **I am changing the scope of my practice. Is this considered a closure of practice?**

Yes, you are still considered to be closing your practice in relation to those patients whose medical care no longer falls within your scope of practice. You are expected to comply with all applicable parts of the Standard of Practice.

**I am closing my practice and another healthcare provider is taking over my practice. Is this considered a closure of practice?**

Yes, you are still considered to be closing your practice and are expected to comply with all applicable parts of the Standard of Practice. If another healthcare provider will be taking over the care of your patients when you leave (or shortly thereafter) you do not need to provide 90 days' notice to your patients. You should, however, communicate with patients about your intended departure and the arrangement you have made with the successor healthcare provider.

**I am moving to a new practice location within the province. Another healthcare provider will be taking over the care of my patients after I leave. Is this considered a closure of practice?**

Yes, you are still considered to be closing your practice and are expected to comply with all applicable parts of the Standard of Practice. If another healthcare provider will be taking over the care of your patients when you leave (or shortly thereafter) you do not need to provide 90 days' notice to your patients. You should, however, communicate with patients about your intended departure and the arrangement you have made with the successor healthcare provider.

**I am taking an extended leave from practice and another healthcare provider will be providing care for my patients during this leave. Do I still need to give 90 days' notice?**

If another healthcare provider will be taking over the care of your patients during your leave, you do not need to provide 90 days' notice to your patients. You should, however, take reasonable steps to ensure that patients seeking care during your leave are aware that another healthcare provider will be providing that care. To accomplish this, you may wish to notify patients during regular clinic appointments, place signage in your waiting room, and/or ask staff members to notify patients when they contact your office to book an appointment.

**How do I notify the College of a closure or leave from practice?**

Complete the [Notification of Closure or Leave Form](#) on our website and submit it to the College.

**How do I determine which patients I need to notify?**

You must notify all patients who you are actively managing as well as those who are part of your practice roster – patients who, if they contact your office, will be offered an appointment. If your involvement with the patient has reached its natural or expected conclusion and neither you nor the patient would have an expectation of an ongoing relationship, you do not need to provide notice.

**Am I required to find a new healthcare provider for my patients?**

You should take reasonable steps to reduce the impact of the closure of your practice on the continuity of care for your patients. This might include, for example, asking colleagues if they are able to assume care of patients requiring ongoing care, particularly those with acute or complex healthcare needs. Any patients requiring ongoing specialty care who cannot be transferred to a colleague should be referred back to their primary care provider.

**What should I do with my patient's medical records?**

Medical records must be stored in a safe and secure environment which ensures their confidentiality. This includes taking reasonable steps to protect records from theft or loss and restricting access to authorized persons. Record management protocols must be in place to regulate who can gain access to the medical record and what they can do, according to their role and responsibilities.

You may choose to transfer medical records to another custodian or a bonded record retention facility for the purposes of secure storage. If you are transferring records, please note that you must ensure that a written contract is in place with the accepting custodian or record retention facility that ensures the requirements of the College's Standard of Practice on [Medical Records Documentation & Management](#) and those outlined in the [Personal Health Information Act](#) will continue to be met.

**Can I charge a patient for a copy of their medical record?**

This service would be considered an uninsured service for which you may request a fee directly from the patient. Please see the College's Practice Guideline on [Uninsured Services](#) for more information.

**How long do I have to hold on to a patient's medical records?**

In most circumstances, you need to hold on to the records for 10 years following your last clinical encounter. Exceptions exist for minors and special circumstances. Please see the College's Standard of Practice on [Medical Records Documentation & Management](#) for more information.

**Can I destroy medical records after the applicable retention period?**

You may destroy medical records following the applicable retention period (see above). You must ensure the records are destroyed in such a way that they cannot reasonably be reconstructed.

**Can I write prescriptions that extend beyond my practice closure?**

Where it is medically appropriate and safe for the patient, you can issue extended prescriptions. Examples may include patients who have long-term or chronic conditions that are likely to remain stable for the duration of the dispensing period. It is best to document your reasons for issuing the prescription in the patient's medical record.

**What should I do with leftover pharmaceuticals?**

You must appropriately transfer or safely dispose of all pharmaceuticals. Contact your local pharmacy for information on safe disposal.

**I must unexpectedly close my practice. What should I do?**

If you are unexpectedly absent from practice due to circumstances beyond your control, the College recognizes that you might not be able to fully comply with this standard. Do what is practicable in your circumstances. When possible, notify us of your unexpected leave so we can appropriately respond to inquiries from patients who may contact our offices.

### **How can I plan for an unexpected closure of practice?**

It can be uncomfortable to think about the possible unexpected closure of your practice. In such a circumstance, people close to you (professionally and/or personally) will be called upon to close your practice and your advanced planning will assist them. At a minimum, let these people know about the College so we can help them understand the need to notify patients and arrange for safe storage and transfer of medical records.

### **I still have questions. Who can help me?**

Contact the College by [email](#). We will direct your inquiry to the appropriate person at our office.

### **Related Documents**

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Newfoundland and Labrador Standard of Practice on [Closing or Taking Leave from a Medical Practice](#)

### **Document History**

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