



Standard of Practice

Closing or Taking Leave from a Medical Practice (2023)

A **Standard of Practice** is the minimum standard of professional behavior and ethical conduct expected by the College on a specific issue.

Preamble

The College expects physicians to take reasonable measures to reduce the impact of closure of or leave from their practice on the continuity of care for patients.

Definitions

- **Closure of practice:** the cessation of practice in a location where the physician has no intention of reopening (e.g., retirement, moving a significant distance [one where patients would not reasonably be expected to follow the physician], a change in scope of practice, or decreasing the volume of a medical practice to the point that requires a reduction of the number of patients).
- **Leave from practice:** the temporary closure of a physician's practice for a period of three months or longer (e.g., sabbatical leave, parental leave, educational leave, medical leave, or disciplinary action).

Standard of Practice

Physicians must take reasonable measures to reduce the impact of a **planned** closure of or leave from practice on the continuity of care for patients. Such measures, as further detailed in this Standard of Practice, include:

1. Notifying patients
2. Notifying the College
3. Notifying NL Health Services and colleagues
4. Arranging for storage and access to medical records
5. Reviewing laboratory results and diagnostic imaging reports
6. Issuing prescriptions

Exceptions

In situations where a physician is unexpectedly absent from practice due to circumstances beyond their control (e.g., sudden illness), the physician should, to the best of their ability and as soon as it is practical to do so, take steps to comply with this Standard of Practice.

1. Notifying Patients

The College expects a physician to notify patients of a **planned** closure of practice or leave from practice.

When the nature of a physician's practice or the care being provided (e.g., emergency room physician) holds no expectation of an ongoing physician-patient relationship, there is no requirement to notify patients of an intended closure or leave from practice.

Notice Period

A physician should provide patients with a **minimum** of 90 days' notice of a planned closure of practice or leave from practice.

The notice may be shortened when a successor physician takes over the practice at the time of the physician's departure (or shortly thereafter) or during the physician's leave from practice.

Method of Notification

Possible methods a physician may notify a patient include:

- During a clinic visit;
- Letter to the patient;
- Telephone call to the patient; or
- Email to the patient.

In addition, signage should be placed in the physician's office, notifying patients of the closure or leave from practice. Physicians may post notices on their professional social media accounts as a supplemental form of notification.

Details of Notification

The notification should include the following information:

- Date of the physician's planned closure of practice or leave from practice;
- Name of the successor physician who will assume responsibility for the medical practice (if applicable);

- Details on how patients can obtain a copy of their medical records in advance of the practice closure or leave from practice;
- The location where patient medical records will be stored following closure of practice or leave from practice (if known at the time of providing the notification); and
- The plan for continuity of care for patients (if any), including follow-up on diagnostic tests and referrals for consultation.

2. Notifying the College

When a physician contemplates closing or taking leave from practice, they must notify the College **in advance of the closure** by completing the approved form and submitting it to the College.

In circumstances where a physician will no longer hold professional liability protection or coverage following the closure of their practice or during a leave from practice, the physician must contact the College by email (licensing@cpsnl.ca) to request that their licence be changed to “Non-Practising” status.

3. Notifying NL Health Services and Colleagues

Physicians should provide notification of a closure of or leave from practice to NL Health Services. If a successor physician will be assuming the care of a physician’s practice, the departing physician should communicate the name and contact information of the successor physician to ensure the forwarding of laboratory results and diagnostic imaging reports.

Where possible, the College also recommends that a physician provide notice to colleagues who also provide care to the physician’s patient (e.g., referring physicians). This may include transferring the patient’s care back to the referring physician.

4. Arranging Storage for and Access to Medical Records

The College expects a physician who closes or takes a leave from practice to arrange for the appropriate storage or transfer of patient medical records in accordance with the [Personal Health Information Act](#) and the College’s Standard of Practice on [Medical Records Documentation & Management](#).

Physicians who transfer patient records to another physician or a medical records storage provider are expected to provide patients with the information necessary to access a copy of their medical records in advance of and following the closure of practice.

The College’s expectations around charging for the transfer or copying of medical records are set out in the Practice Guideline on [Uninsured Services](#). Physicians should inform the patient of any fee to be charged before providing the uninsured service.

5. Reviewing Laboratory Results and Diagnostic Imaging Reports

In the period following the notice of closure of or leave from practice, a physician should communicate the intended plan for reviewing laboratory results and diagnostic imaging reports to patients when they are provided with requisitions.

When possible, the College recommends that physicians make arrangements with another qualified healthcare provider to communicate the results of laboratory tests diagnostic imaging reports which are received following a closure or leave from practice. In circumstances where it is not possible to make such an arrangement, physicians should advise their patient that they will need to follow-up with another healthcare provider to obtain laboratory results and diagnostic imaging reports completed after the physician's closure of or leave from practice.

6. Issuing Prescriptions

Physicians are expected to use their clinical judgement to determine whether any prescriptions should be issued beyond the closure of their practice and document accordingly.

Planning for Unexpected Closures

Physicians should proactively plan for an unexpected closure of their practice. This could include, for example, identifying a designate (e.g., office administrator, colleague) who can provide notification of the practice closure to the College and arrange for the storage of medical records.

Acknowledgements

CPSBC (2021) Leaving Practice
CPSA (2021) Closing or Leaving a Medical Practice
CPSO (2019) Closing a Medical Practice
CMPA (2022) Closing or Leaving a Practice: Tips for Primary Care Physicians

Related Documents

CPSNL (2023) [Medical Records Documentation & Management](#)
CPSNL (2022) [Uninsured Services](#)
[Personal Health Information Act, SNL 2008, Chapter P-7.01](#)

Document History

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