



# Standard of Practice:

## Complementary & Alternative Medicine (2022)

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

### Complementary & Alternative Medicine

#### Preamble

Patients have the right to make health care decisions that reflect their own values, wishes and preferences. Such decisions may include complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) therapies either as an adjunct to conventional medicine or in the place of conventional medicine. The College expects that when physicians practice CAM, that they do so in a manner which is informed by evidence and science and is in keeping with professional, ethical, and legal obligations.

#### Definitions

**Complementary and alternative medicine (CAM)** – healthcare approaches developed outside of conventional medicine, including:

**Complementary medicine** – non-conventional therapy and practices used in conjunction with conventional medicine.

**Alternative medicine** – non-conventional therapy and practices used in the absence of conventional medicine.

**Conventional medicine** – the type of treatment, diagnostic analysis, and conceptualization of disease or ailment that is the primary focus of medical practice. It is evidence-informed, science-based, and typically provided in hospitals and communities in the form of specialty or primary care practices.

## **Standard of Practice**

Physicians practising CAM must practice in a manner that is informed by medical evidence and science and is in keeping with their professional, ethical, and legal obligations.

Physicians must provide clear, accurate, and truthful information when recommending CAM therapies and practices. Physicians must always act in patients' best interests and should never exploit the vulnerability or finances of patients for personal gain or gratification.

### **Expectations for Practising CAM**

Prior to recommending CAM, physicians must consider whether they are acting within the limits of their knowledge, skills, and judgments, and only proceed when they are within the scope of their clinical competence.

The College expects that prior to practising CAM, a physician will conduct a clinical assessment on the patient which meets the standard of conventional medicine. If the patient has seen other health care providers for the same ailment and has had a clinical assessment completed, the physician can rely on this assessment if they have reviewed the assessment and are satisfied it meets the standard.

Following completion of a clinical assessment, the physician must inform the patient about the conventional medicine therapies which are appropriate for the patient's diagnosis. The College expects that all physicians will remain current with the conventional medicine therapies which are within their scope of practice.

Prior to recommending a CAM therapeutic option, a physician must evaluate the best available evidence relating to the proposed therapy or practice and only recommend options which:

- (a) are appropriate for the patient's diagnosis;
- (b) have a reasonable expectation of remedying or alleviating the patient's health condition or symptoms; and
- (c) have a favorable risk/benefit ratio based on the merits of the option, the potential interactions with other treatments the patient is receiving, the conventional therapeutic options available, and other considerations the physician deems relevant.

Physicians must not recommend therapeutic options that have been proven to be ineffective.

A physician must counsel the patient, to the best of their ability and knowledge, about the risk and benefits of any proposed CAM therapy or practice so the patient can give informed consent. The College expects that through the consent process, physicians will convey the following information to patients:

- (a) the rationale for recommending the CAM;

- (b) the reasonable expectations about the clinical efficacy of the CAM;
- (c) the level of support for the CAM by both the conventional and CAM community;
- (d) a description of how the CAM compares to conventional medicine that would be offered to treat the same symptoms or condition;
- (e) information about the conventional therapeutic options that would be offered to treat the same symptoms or conditions; and
- (f) disclosure of their financial interest, if any, in the CAM.

If the patient provides informed consent for a CAM therapeutic option, the treating physician must ensure ongoing assessment is conducted to evaluate the effectiveness and safety of the therapy provided.

### **Providing Information to the Public**

When providing or interpreting scientific knowledge to the public, physicians are expected to provide opinions consistent with the current and widely accepted views of the profession and clearly indicate when an opinion is contrary to the accepted views of the profession. This obligation is codified in the [Canadian Medical Association's Code of Ethics and Professionalism \(2018\)](#) which has been adopted by the College.

### **Acknowledgements**

CPSBC (2022) Complementary and Alternative Therapies  
CPSA (2021) Practising Outside of Established Conventional Medicine  
CPSO (2021) Complementary and Alternative Medicine  
CPSS (2020) Complementary and Alternative Therapies  
Federation of State Medical Boards (2002). [Model Guidelines for the Use of Complementary and Alternative Therapies in Medical Practice.](#)

### **Related Documents**

[CMA \(2018\) Code of Ethics and Professionalism](#)

## Document History

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