



# Physical Examinations & Procedures

## Standard of Practice

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

### Preamble

College Registrants must conduct physical examinations and procedures in a professional and respectful manner which values the autonomy and dignity of the patient.

### Definitions

<b>Chaperone</b>	an impartial observer who serves as a witness for both a patient and a College Registrant as a safeguard for both parties during a clinical encounter.
<b>Sensitive Examination</b>	a clinical examination of either the pelvic, genital, breast, or perianal area of a patient's body.

### Standard of Practice

Prior to conducting a physical examination or procedure, a College Registrant must:

- Obtain informed consent in accordance with the College's Standard of Practice on [Consent to Treatment](#).
- Provide privacy for the patient to undress and a gown or cloth to drape if the patient must disrobe for the examination.

During a physical examination or procedure, a College Registrant must:

- Stop the examination if consent is withdrawn. If there are any obvious non-verbal cues of withdrawal of consent (e.g. clear signs of pain, pushing away, shaking head "no"), confirm consent before continuing.
- Explain any changes to the scope of the examination or procedure and seek consent prior to proceeding.
- Not assist the patient with the adjustment or removal of clothing unless the patient consents.
- Only expose the area of the patient's body specifically related to the physical examination or procedure.
- Refrain from making remarks or gestures which could be interpreted by the patient as demeaning or sexualized.

## Chaperones

A chaperone is an impartial observer who serves as a witness for both a patient and a College Registrant as a safeguard for both parties during a clinical encounter. A chaperone can be another healthcare professional, an administrative staff member, or any other individual who meets the criteria set out below.

All patients **must** be offered the option of having a chaperone present for sensitive examinations.

College Registrants must explain the role of the chaperone to the patient and seek their consent before the chaperone enters the examination area. The presence of the chaperone should be documented in the patient's medical record.

College Registrants must be satisfied that the chaperone:

- Understands their role;
- Understands the requirement to maintain confidentiality;
- Is familiar with the examination/procedure involved or briefed in advance; and
- Can observe the examination/procedure as much as practical without obstructing the College Registrant or interfering with the patient's dignity.

College Registrants have the option to request the presence of a chaperone for any examination or procedure. If the patient refuses, the College Registrant should:

1. Explain why a chaperone is recommended.
2. Offer any available alternative options (e.g. rescheduling with a colleague).
3. Assess the urgency of the patient's medical needs to determine if delaying the examination or procedure would adversely affect their health.
4. Ensure the patient understands any risks associated with delaying the examination or procedure.
5. Exercise sound professional judgment in determining whether to proceed, taking into consideration the best interests of the patient and any potential risks to the College Registrant.
6. Document the discussion, the decision on whether to proceed, and reasons why in the patient's medical records.

## **References**

General Medical Council of the United Kingdom (2025) Intimate Examinations and Chaperones

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (2024) Boundary Violations

Canadian Medical Protective Association (2023) Is It Time to Rethink Your Use of Chaperones?

College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia (2023) Physical Examinations and Procedures

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (2019) Key Roles of Medical Office Chaperones

Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada Reaffirmed Guidelines (2017) [The presence of a third party during breast and pelvic examinations.](#)

Rose, K. et al, BMJ Open, (2015) Jul 15,5(7) [The importance of a medical chaperone: a quality improvement study exploring the use of a note stamp in a tertiary breast surgery unit](#)

## Document History

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