



Standard of Practice

Withdrawal of Physician Services During Job Action (2023)

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

Preamble

Physicians have the right to withdraw their services for job action under specific circumstances. The College expects physicians to thoughtfully consider any contemplated Withdrawal of Services and act in accordance with this Standard of Practice.

Definitions

- **Job Action:** the threatened or actual withdrawal of physician services to further a negotiating position during a dispute.
- **Withdrawal of Services:** for the purposes of this Standard, limiting the services an individual physician or group of physicians provides in the context of job action. Examples include, but are not limited to, declining shifts in circumstances where coverage would otherwise be lacking, complete withdrawal of medicine services.

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The ultimate responsibility for any Withdrawal of Services rests with the individual physician to act in the public interest and to ensure that their actions are consistent with the ethical and professional standards expected by the College.

When contemplating a Withdrawal of Services, the College expects physicians to first explore all alternative options that may be available to resolve the concern giving rise to the contemplated Withdrawal of Services.

If a physician's concern giving rise to a contemplated Withdrawal of Services cannot be resolved, they must consider the following factors before making the decision to engage in a Withdrawal of Services:

- 1) the nature of the physician's practice and the patient population served;
- 2) the location of the physician's practice and the availability of other physician services in the area;
- 3) availability of alternative arrangements for care and ongoing monitoring;

- 4) management plan for unforeseen emergency situations; and
- 5) assessment of the potential risk of harm to patients and/or the public.

Physicians must not engage in a Withdrawal of Services unless they have ensured that the proposed Withdrawal of Services will not pose an undue risk of harm to patients, and they have taken steps to mitigate the impact of the Withdrawal of Services.

During a Withdrawal of Services, physicians must provide medical services to patients in need of urgent/emergency care. This includes ensuring their patients' healthcare needs are assessed and appropriately triaged so that urgent/emergency care can be obtained. In determining what constitutes urgent/emergency care, a physician must use their clinical judgment, informed by the existing health status and specific needs of the patient, and the physician's individual and collective responsibilities to provide care.

Physicians must recognize the need for ongoing monitoring of patients with whom there is an established relationship and could suffer harm and/or deterioration during a delay in medical care. Physicians must ensure that arrangements are in place to facilitate this monitoring and provide necessary urgent/emergency care throughout the Withdrawal of Services.

Physicians must inform their patients of their decision to participate in a Withdrawal of Services and of their commitment to make provision for access to urgent/emergency services and for the ongoing monitoring of patients where appropriate.

Acknowledgements

CPSS (2023) Withdrawal of Physician Services During Job Action
CPSBC (2022) Withdrawal of Medical Services During Job Action
CPSA (2021) Job Action

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