

PRACTICE STANDARD

Complementary and Alternative Therapies

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Related topic(s): [Cannabis for Medical Purposes](#); [Charging for Uninsured Services](#)

A **practice standard** reflects the minimum standard of professional behaviour and ethical conduct on a specific topic or issue expected by the College of its registrants (all physicians and surgeons who practise medicine in British Columbia). Standards also reflect relevant legal requirements and are enforceable under the [Health Professions Act](#), RSBC 1996, c.183 (*HPA*) and College [Bylaws](#) under the *HPA*.

Preamble

This document is a practice standard of the Board of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia.

College's position

Patients have a right to make decisions about their health care including choosing complementary or alternative therapies instead of, or as an adjunct to, conventional medicine.

For the purpose of this practice standard:

Complementary therapy refers to any non-conventional practice of a range of medical therapies that fall beyond the scope of scientific medicine that is used together with conventional medicine

Alternative therapy refers to any non-conventional practice of a range of medical therapies that fall beyond the scope of scientific medicine that is used in place of conventional medicine

Registrants who choose to use complementary or alternative therapies

Registrants who choose to practise complementary and alternative therapies must practise in a manner that is informed by medical evidence and science and is in keeping with their professional, ethical and legal obligations. Registrants must always act within the scope of their practice based on their qualifications, skill, knowledge and level of competence.

Should a registrant choose to provide their patient with a complementary or alternative therapy, they must:

- conduct appropriate and conventional examinations and investigations in order to establish a diagnosis and basis for treatment
- not delay or replace the use of an effective and proven therapy with a complementary or alternative therapy, except at the direction of the patient
- advise the patient unambiguously if the safety and/or effectiveness of a proposed intervention is contrary to the accepted views of the medical profession and counsel the patient, to the best of their ability and knowledge, about the risks, benefits and alternatives of all options (including the option of no treatment) so that the patient can give informed consent
 - the details of the consent process, including the rationale for providing an alternative therapy as explained to the patient, must be documented in the patient's medical record
- be satisfied that the proposed care and health benefits are safe, or at minimum, do not pose a greater risk to the patient than comparable conventional interventions or than the absence of treatment
- never exploit the emotions, vulnerability, or finances of a patient for personal gain or gratification

- set fees for non-insured services that are reasonable and commensurate with the service(s) provided, discuss the fee with the patient prior to providing the therapy and consider the patient's ability to pay when determining the fee (see *Charging for Uninsured Services*)
- ensure ongoing assessment is conducted to evaluate the effectiveness and safety of the therapy provided
- when speaking publicly, provide opinions consistent with the current and widely accepted views of the profession when interpreting scientific knowledge to the public; clearly indicate when an opinion may be contrary to the accepted views of the profession

Obligations when a patient is attending another provider for complementary or alternative therapy

Registrants must respect the autonomy of the patient in choosing from available treatment options. If the patient's choice of a complementary or alternative therapy has made it impossible for the registrant to discharge their ethical responsibilities, in exceptional circumstances, it may be acceptable to terminate the patient-registrant relationship. In such instances, a well-documented attempt to reasonably accommodate the patient's preferences and a rationale for the decision to terminate the relationship must be included in the patient record.

Professional affiliations with complementary or alternative health-care providers

Registrants are reminded that the *Health Professions Act* requires regulatory colleges to promote and enhance collaborative relations with other colleges and interprofessional collaborative practice between registrants and persons practising another health profession.

In choosing to form a professional affiliation with a regulated complementary or alternative health-care provider, registrants should be satisfied that they fulfill the requirements set out in this practice standard.