

January 27, 2025

CPSO Ending the Physician-Patient Relationship Policy

Statement from the OMA Section on Plastic Surgery

The OMA Section on Plastic Surgery appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the updated CPSO draft policy '*Ending the Physician-Patient Relationship*' and the accompanying '*Advice to the Profession*' document. We commend the College for its efforts to improve information and guidance for physicians who are required to end a physician-patient relationship.

Our Section is generally in agreement with the CPSO policy's intent and direction. However, we believe that several clarifications would enhance the policy.

1. Circumstances Where Physicians Cannot End the Physician-Patient Relationship (Point 5a)

The policy document states that physicians cannot end a physician – patient relationship because a patient does not follow medical advice. This is a very broad statement. In a specialist practice, a surgeon may suggest a treatment (i.e. surgery) that the patient does not agree with or want to undergo. The surgeon may not have any other treatment options available to address the patient's condition or concerns. If the surgeon feels that they no longer have anything to offer the patient, but the patient is unhappy with this reality, would the surgeon not be able to end this relationship because medical advice is not being followed?

2. Advice to the Profession: Ending the Physician-Patient Relationship, Considerations for Deciding to End the Physician-Patient Relationship (Line 53)

The policy suggests that patients who "have been absent from the practice for an extended period of time" should be factored into this relationship. For specialists, specifying a clear time frame is crucial, as the responsibility for patients not seen for over one year can be unduly burdensome. Typically, if a patient has not engaged with a specialist for more than twelve months or presents with a new condition, a referral from the family physician is expected. Establishing a defined absence threshold in the policy would greatly enhance operational clarity.

3. Advice to the Profession: Considerations for Deciding to End the Physician-Patient Relationship (Line 60)

As this policy aims to modernize prior versions, it is prudent to incorporate considerations regarding patients' online and social media behavior. Online bullying or disparagement of a medical practitioner may constitute "abusive or disruptive behavior," effectively signaling a breakdown in the physician-patient relationship. Providing explicit guidance on this matter would be invaluable, as many physicians are navigating these challenges in their daily practices. Providing this as a specific example might also be particularly helpful/pertinent.

Thank you for considering these observations. We believe that addressing these points will strengthen the policy and provide clearer guidance for our section members.

If any further clarification is required, we would be happy to discuss this at further length.

Sincerely,



Ryan E. Austin, MD, FRCSC
Chair, Ontario Medical Association Section on Plastic Surgery