



# Standard of Practice: Chaperones (2021)

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

## Chaperones

### Preamble

The presence of a third party chaperone during clinical examinations and procedures may promote patient comfort and ensure the protection of both the patient and physician.

### Definitions

**Chaperone:** an appropriately-trained individual who works with a physician to observe examinations, procedures, and/or clinical encounters.

**Sensitive examination:** a clinical examination of either the pelvic, genital, breast or rectal area of a patient's body.

### Standard of Practice

Physicians should consider whether the presence of a chaperone would contribute to an individual patient's feeling of comfort and security. A chaperone may also protect a physician from unfounded allegations.

### Sensitive Examinations

Physicians must provide their patients the option of having a third party present during all sensitive examinations.

If a patient requests to have a chaperone present for a sensitive examination, the physician must comply with this request. In circumstances where a chaperone is unavailable, the physician should:

- Give the patient the option to reschedule the examination or be referred to another physician;
- Explain any risks associated with delaying the examination; and
- Document the discussion.

## **Patient Consent**

Consent of the patient is required for a chaperone to be present during a clinical encounter. Consent for the chaperone's presence should be obtained before the chaperone enters the examination room to ensure the patient is comfortable with the proposed chaperone's presence. Physicians should explain the role of the chaperone and record the presence of a chaperone in the patient's medical record.

In circumstances where a physician wishes to have a chaperone present and the patient declines, the physician must consider whether it is appropriate to proceed with the clinical encounter. In determining whether to proceed, the physician should consider the best interests of the patient, whether the assessment is urgently needed, and the potential risk of harm to the physician. Physicians should document the circumstances in the patient's medical record.

## **Responsibilities of Physicians**

Physicians are responsible for ensuring that the chaperone is appropriately trained. This includes a requirement that the chaperone:

- understands their role as an independent observer;
- understands the requirement to display sensitive and respectful behaviour;
- has received necessary training in privacy and confidentiality (ie. PHIA); and
- is familiar with any examinations or procedures performed during the clinical encounter.

Physicians are also responsible for ensuring that the chaperone:

- is positioned to obtain an unobstructed view of the clinical encounter; and
- is prepared to raise concerns about the physician's actions/behaviours, where necessary and appropriate.

## Acknowledgements

CPSA (2019). Key roles of medical office chaperones.

CPSO (2019). Boundary Violations (Policy).

Canadian Medical Protective Association (2019). Is it time to rethink your use of chaperones?

## References

SOGC Reaffirmed Guidelines (2017). The presence of a third party during breast and pelvic examinations.

## Document History

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