



Reporting Sexual Abuse

Do You Think Your Doctor Crossed the Line?

The patient-doctor relationship is based on trust. Sexual abuse by your doctor violates that trust and is never acceptable. Any sexual behaviour between a doctor and a patient is sexual abuse.

If you think your doctor has crossed the line, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario wants to hear from you. You can start by calling us at 1-800-268-7096, ext. 629.

As the province's regulator of doctors, the College has zero tolerance for sexual abuse and we investigate every complaint.

Coming forward can be hard. To help, we want you to understand why it's important to report possible sexual abuse – and what you can expect when you do.

How do I recognize sexual abuse?

In the practice of medicine, doctors may use their hands to touch various parts of your body. That's part of many necessary clinical exams (for example, to check your overall health or look into a concern you have). When that happens, you should expect a doctor to tell you what he/she is going to do, to ask permission to touch you, to let you ask questions, and to treat you with respect. Doctors are obliged to act professionally and ethically with patients at all times.

Sexual abuse is a serious breach of trust and can include the following:

- **Sexual relations of any form with a patient.**
- **Unnecessary or improper physical examinations.**

Examples:

- touching your breasts, genitals, buttocks or pelvic area in a way that's not needed for treatment or assessment;
- conducting an exam in a sexual rather than a medical way; or
- touching you without your permission or explanation.



Has a doctor said or done something to make you feel uncomfortable? If you think you may have experienced sexual abuse by an Ontario doctor, please call the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario at 1-800-268-7096, ext. 629.

• **Inappropriate comments, gestures or behaviour.**

Examples:

- saying something sexually suggestive;
- asking you on a date;
- making sexualized comments on your appearance or clothing;
- commenting unnecessarily about your sexual relationships or sexual orientation;
- making sexually insulting or offensive comments or jokes; or
- giving unwanted attention (like kissing or hugging).

All of this is considered sexual abuse when a doctor does it to a patient.

What if I didn't object?

Even if you didn't object and think you were a willing participant, by law, the doctor's actions/remarks are still inappropriate and unacceptable.

Sometimes, a patient doesn't protest what the doctor is doing. Maybe the patient was even the one who started an intimate/sexual relationship with the doctor. It doesn't matter. There is no such thing as patient consent in these situations. In all cases, it is the doctor's responsibility, and never the patient's, to understand and maintain an appropriate relationship.

Why should I tell the College?

The College relies on patients to tell us when things aren't right. That's what helps us to protect the public. Most of the time, we learn about sexual abuse from people who make complaints.

Incidents of sexual abuse often are not isolated and by telling the College what happened, you may also be helping others. Your information also allows us to investigate more effectively.

Reporting sexual abuse by your doctor can also help you too. It might bring you some sense of closure. You'll know the College is looking into the matter and taking action.

Who do I tell?

You can call the College to discuss your concerns, learn more about how we can help and/or make a complaint. When you do, you'll talk to a support person who has a background in social work and is trained and experienced in helping patients who've been sexually abused. You can call **1-800-268-7096, ext. 629**.

In the first call, you don't have to give your name if you don't want to. You can go over what happened, and find out about the College's complaints and discipline process and what to expect. If you prefer, you can meet in person. Should you decide to make a formal complaint, we'll start an investigation and our support person will be available to support you through it.

Will the doctor know I complained?

If you decide to complain, yes. In an investigation, the College must tell the doctor your name so that he or she can respond.

Will my complaint be taken seriously?

The College takes any complaints – about sexual abuse or anything else– seriously. As part of our role to protect the public, we investigate all complaints thoroughly.

If I make a complaint, how does the process work?

More details on how complaints are handled and what's involved can be found here on our website at cpso.on.ca.

How else can the College help if I've been sexually abused by a doctor?

The College provides funding to cover the costs of therapy or counselling for patients who have been sexually abused by their doctor. After you submit an application, the College's Patient Relations Committee will determine if you're eligible. Please visit www.cpso.on.ca/therapy for information on the fund. Or call 1-800-268-7096, ext. 211.