



Professional Standards Regarding Advertising and Public Communications by Physicians

This document is a **standard** approved by Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia.

A **standard** reflects the minimum professional and ethical behavior, conduct or practice expected by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia. Physicians licensed with the College are required to be familiar with and comply with the College standards.

Preamble

Canadian law recognizes advertising by professionals as protected free speech, with such advertising to be regulated to maintain a high standard of professionalism.

Professional Standard(s)

1. Physicians must ensure that any public communication is compatible with the best interests of the public and upholds the reputation of the medical profession.
2. Regardless of the medium, all communication by physicians with the public must not be misleading or deceptive.
3. Advertising

Specifically, any communication by physicians with the public must not:

- a. claim or imply any superiority of a particular physician or service over any other member or services of the profession;
- b. contain any claims, endorsements or testimonials regarding a physician's ability or services;
- c. create unrealistic or unjustified expectations of beneficial treatment or warranties about results;
- d. offer any inducements for the public to seek a medical service; and
- e. promote health services or facilities in which they have a financial interest.

4. Fees

When a physician is advertising medical care that is not a publically insured service, the physician has an obligation to communicate that fees will be charged to patients.

5. Specialist Representation

Physicians must not identify themselves as specialists unless they are certified, or eligible for certification by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, the College of Family Physicians of Canada or Collège des médecins du Québec.

6. Special Interest Identification

When advertising a special interest within their practice, physicians must be able to demonstrate the interest is supported by relevant training, experience, and continuing professional development. If physicians have received certification in a special interest area that is not recognized by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia, they must identify the certifying body.

Definitions

Advertising is any communication, in any medium, whether spoken, text or image based, that has for one of its purposes, the promotion of the physician, clinic or group with which the physician is directly or indirectly associated.

Public communication is the transmission of information to the public in any medium, including online and social media communications.

Resources

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia:

- [Professional Standards Regarding Conflict of Interest](#)
- [Professional Standards and Guidelines Regarding the Sale of Products and Services to Patients](#)

Canadian Medical Association:

- [Canadian Medical Association Code of Ethics](#)
- [Physician Guidelines for Online Communication with Patients](#)

Canadian Medical Protective Association:

- [Commercial Interests and How Physicians Can Avoid the Pitfalls, 2015](#)
- [Social Media: The opportunities, the realities, 2014](#)
- [Top 10 tips for using social media in professional practice, 2014](#)

Acknowledgements

The development of this College standard was informed by similar documents produced by the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons in British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta.

Document History

First approved by the Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia: **December 9, 2005**

This document was reviewed and re-approved without changes by the Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia: **December 10, 2010**

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