



Professional Standards Regarding Billing

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

The College endorses the [Canadian Medical Association Code of Ethics](#), which recognizes that physicians must not exploit patients and must use healthcare resources prudently.

Medical care is changing, with more delivery by physicians of publicly uninsured services (hence **private medicine**) in addition to insured services paid for by the Nova Scotia Medical Services Insurance Program or MSI (hence **public medicine**).

Whether for private or public medicine, inappropriate billing is recognized by the College as a form of professional misconduct.

When providing private medical services, physicians bear the responsibility to inform their patients about the commercial aspects of the transaction and to deliver services in accordance with the standards of the profession.

When purchasing private medicine, patients bear a responsibility to be informed about the financial risks related to the healthcare they are buying.

Professional Standard(s)

1. Physicians must be able to demonstrate that any medical service, public or private, was delivered in the patient's best interest.

2. Physicians must not charge patients for any services for which they receive compensation by any other means.
3. Physicians must not bill for undocumented services.
4. Physicians must maintain clear documentation in support of all billed services in accordance with the [College's Professional Standard Regarding Medical Records](#).
5. Physicians must advise patients of fees for administrative tasks in advance of providing the service. As provided for in the [College's Guidelines for Completing Patient Forms](#), such fees must be reasonable, consistent, and reflect the time required to complete the form.
6. Physicians must adhere to the principles of ethical billing set out in [MSI's Physician Manual](#).
7. In advance of providing private medical services, physicians must advise patients of the availability of any insured alternatives for the private service being offered.
8. To obtain an informed consent for a private medical service, the physician must advise the patient of all fees or costs associated with the service. This obligation is in addition to the elements of informed consent set out in the [College's Professional Standards and Guidelines Regarding Informed Patient Consent to Treatment](#).
9. Physicians must ensure that the costs of clinical investigations ordered in support of private medical services are paid by the patient or incorporated into the cost for the private service. Specifically, it is the responsibility of the physician to ensure that public funds are not spent to pay for investigations, such as blood work or imaging, ordered as part of a private medical procedure.

Resources

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia:

- [Professional Standards Regarding Conflict of Interest](#)
- [Professional Standard Regarding Medical Records](#)
- [Guidelines for Completing Patient Forms](#)
- [Professional Standards and Guidelines Regarding Informed Patient Consent to Treatment](#)
- [Professional Standards Regarding the Sale of Products and Services to Patients](#)
- [Professional Standards and Guidelines Regarding Third-Party Examinations and Reports](#)

Canadian Medical Association:

- [Guidelines for Physicians in Interactions with Industry](#)
- [Canadian Medical Association Code of Ethics](#)

Canadian Medical Protective Association:

- [Responding to a Billing Audit: How Good Records Can Help, 2017](#)
- [Commercial Interests and How Physicians Can Avoid the Pitfalls, 2015](#)
- [Physicians and Research: Understanding the legal, ethical and professional obligations, 2014](#)

Document History

As recommended by the Executive of the Provincial Medical Board (now known as the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia): **December 22, 1995**

Approved by the Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia: **May 27, 2016**

This standard replaces *Professional Standards Regarding Block Billing and Charging for Uninsured Services* and was approved by the Council of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia: **May 25, 2018**

Approximate date of next review: **2021**

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