

**COLLEGE OF PODIATRIC SURGEONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA**  
**STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES**

**ACCESS TO PODIATRIC CARE**

**GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

This document is a standard of the College of Podiatric Surgeons of British Columbia. It draws largely from and follows closely a similar policy of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia

Access to appropriate health and medical care is a core value of Canadian society. All patients are equally entitled to respectful and fair access to health care services.

Practitioners' professional, ethical, and legal obligations are to act fairly in making decisions about whether to take on or provide care to any particular patient.

**DISCRIMINATION**

For the purposes of this policy, "discrimination" is an unfair or arbitrary standard, process or treatment based upon race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation, and age and includes denial of a request for reasonable accommodation for a disability or religion grounds.

The BC Human Rights Code protects individuals from arbitrary or discriminatory treatment on any of the grounds listed above with respect to the provision of services that are generally offered to the public at large, such as health and medical care services including podiatry services. Allegations of discrimination may result in complaints to both the College and the BC Human Rights Tribunal.

Other persons also are vulnerable and marginalized; for example, those with communication challenges, complex medical problems or conditions related to aging where extra time for assessment may be necessary, insurance claims which require a practitioner to complete lengthy forms, or difficulty complying with recommended treatments as a consequence of active addictions, limited education, involvement in the criminal justice system or social problems. Refusing to treat anyone in these circumstances violates the medical professions' basic ethical principles.

**DEFINED SCOPE OF PRACTICE**

Podiatrists have the right to limit their practice to areas of special interest, for example sports medicine, or to exclude complex surgery. Decisions to accept or refuse new patients on such bases must be made in good faith. Podiatrists who choose to limit their scope of practice should clearly advertise and communicate this to all patients seeking treatment. A defined scope of practice must not be used as a means of unreasonably refusing patients with complex health needs.

**URGENCY OF ACCESS**

Decisions regarding the urgency or prioritization of patient appointments should be based on clear and objective clinical criteria. While not obliged to see all patients, they are required to treat those in need of emergent or urgent medical care. In those situations, podiatrists are expected to provide the care appropriate, taking into account their safety, scope of practice and available options for the patient.

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**CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO PROVIDING CARE**

Podiatrists are not obliged to provide treatments or procedures to patients which are medically unnecessary or considered inappropriate based on scientific evidence and their own clinical expertise.

In such cases, the practitioner must use best efforts to provide the patient with enough information and assistance to allow them to make informed choices for themselves. This includes advising patients that other podiatrists may be available to see them, or suggesting that the patient visit an alternate health-care provider. As in all situations, the practitioner must provide compassionate, non-judgmental care.

**REFUSAL TO ACCEPT A NEW PATIENT**

Podiatric professionals are entitled to refuse to take on new patients who are not in need of urgent care if they are at practice capacity and legitimately need to manage their own work-life balance.

They are also entitled to refuse patients with whom on reasonable grounds they do not believe they can have an effective therapeutic relationship. Introductory meetings are acceptable for the purpose of becoming acquainted with a prospective patient and their health, concerns and history. Both patient and practitioner should determine whether there is a foundation for a therapeutic relationship. Such meetings must not be used to select the “easy cases” and screen out patients with more difficult health concerns, such as chronic disease unless the case falls outside of their scope of practice.

Decisions not to accept an individual as a patient should be conveyed respectfully and honestly, with assistance offered to find an alternate health-care provider when and as appropriate. Reasons for such a decision must not reflect discrimination as outlined above, and should be appropriately documented.

**COMPLAINTS**

As a regulatory body, the College has a duty to ensure that its registrants behave ethically and above reproach in all respects in their practice. The College will investigate allegations from patients of an unfair denial of podiatric services, and respond promptly and impartially to all complaints.

**PROVEN OFFENCES**

Where conduct contrary to this policy is established, the College will take appropriate measures that are designed to prevent repeated or other future violations.

**CONTACT INFORMATION**

Questions concerning this policy may be referred to the Registrar or to the Board.

**OTHER RELEVANT POLICIES**

Ending the Podiatrist-Patient Relationship – a CPS-BC practice standard