

COLLEGE OF PODIATRIC SURGEONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

AFTER-HOURS COVERAGE

This document is a standard of the Board of the College of Podiatric Surgeons of British Columbia.

When a podiatrist treats a patient they assume a professional, legal and ethical responsibility for the patient's welfare throughout the duration of that podiatric case. The podiatrist's first priority must always be the patient's welfare. The following addresses the podiatrist's obligations to provide appropriate ongoing and after-hours coverage for all patients under their care.

A podiatrist who must be absent from practice for medical or other reasons must communicate with office staff, colleagues and local hospitals as appropriate and warranted given the circumstances of the podiatrist's current active cases, to ensure that patient care is not compromised. Podiatrists should be able to demonstrate in any patient's case that they have made reasonable efforts to ensure that alternate, appropriate podiatric or other care is available when their own services are not.

The College recognizes that providing round-the-clock coverage for patient care can be problematic given the size of the profession in British Columbia. For podiatrists to provide continuous ongoing access to care, participation in an on-call schedule with colleagues is the recommended best practice.

RULES:

1. The podiatrist in every podiatric case must take reasonable steps to ensure that their patient has access to continuing care throughout the duration of the patient's case.
2. The responsibility applies to all medical, including surgical, treatment which the podiatrist has provided to the patient, and on a 24-hour basis.
3. The obligation continues until the case is resolved and requires no further care, the patient has expressly refused further care, another podiatrist has assumed the care responsibility for the patient, or the podiatrist has terminated the podiatrist-patient relationship provided the patient has been given reasonable notice of the termination and appropriate ancillary information.ⁱ
4. After hours contact may be provided by an answering service that has a prompt response time, an answering machine message that provides after-hours contact information for the podiatrist or the other on-call practitioner(s) where the podiatrist participates in an on-call group.
5. Podiatrists do not satisfy this professional responsibility by identifying the locations at which they work. They must provide access to a contact that will respond promptly to the patient.
6. After hours coverage may involve collaboration between neighboring communities, and with practitioners from other health care providers, especially medical doctors, nurse practitioners and registered nurses.

COLLEGE OF PODIATRIC SURGEONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

7. Arrangements should be bilateral in that where patients are to be referred to other practitioners, those practitioners should have agreed in advance to accept that responsibility.
8. Podiatrists are responsible for ensuring that on-call or after-hours shared coverage arrangements are clearly communicated within their on-call groups, and that their colleagues and other health-care professionals who may need to communicate with them about follow-up of diagnostic tests and other ongoing care issues are appropriately informed.
9. Podiatrists must take active steps to ensure that their patients are aware of the on-call or after-hours coverage that is available to them. The arrangements should be explained verbally to the patient, and a handout providing the information should be provided to the patient.
10. In some situations, responsibility for determining on-call scheduling may fall to community hospitals or health authorities if and where such entities privilege or directly contract podiatrists to provide services.
11. Where there is no such hospital or health authority involvement, podiatrists take responsibility for ensuring appropriate coverage, and for communicating on-call or after-hours coverage arrangements with colleagues and patients.
12. Podiatrists may arrange on-call coverage with local emergency departments if all parties have agreed to this arrangement in advance.
13. It is appropriate to leave a voice message on the practice telephone directing patients to attend the local emergency room or dial 911 for after-hours urgent care in a perceived emergency.
14. It is not appropriate to direct patients to emergency facilities for non-urgent care unless arrangements have been agreed to mutually with appropriate emergency room personnel.

ⁱ See CPC-BC Standard on Ending the Podiatrist-Patient Relationship (pending)