

COLLEGE OF PODIATRIC SURGEONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

ENDING THE PODIATRIST - PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

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 podiatrist's duties toward a patient continue until the case is resolved and requires no further care, the patient has expressly refused further care, or another podiatrist has assumed the care responsibility for the patient, unless the podiatrist or the patient terminates the patient relationship.

Podiatrists may ethically and legally decide not to continue seeing a patient, as long as the reasons for that decision are based on the lack of an effective therapeutic relationship and not based on reasons that could be considered discriminatory. For this reason the following addresses the podiatrist's obligations when the patient relationship is terminated by either the practitioner or the patient.

Rules:

1. Having accepted professional responsibility for a patient's case, a podiatrist must continue to provide services respecting that case until:
 - a. The services are no longer required or wanted by the patient with respect to the case,
 - b. Another podiatrist has assumed responsibility for the patient,
 - c. The patient terminates the patient relationship, or
 - d. The podiatrist terminates the relationship.
2. The decision to end a patient relationship should be based on a thoughtful and objective consideration of the reasons mitigating toward ending the relationship.
3. Without limiting the above, a podiatrist may end a patient relationship where:
 - a. The relationship or communication with the patient has broken down to such an extent that there is little prospect of an effective exchange of information; in such cases it is in the patient's best interest to consult with a different practitioner with whom they are capable of having effective communication,
 - b. There is little prospect that the patient can obtain any further therapeutic benefit from the relationship, or
 - c. There is little prospect that the patient will pay the podiatrist's treatment fees.
4. A podiatrist must not discriminate against any patient on such grounds as age, gender, marital status, medical conditions, national or ethnic origin, physical or mental disability, political affiliation, race, religion, cultural heritage, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status, and must not terminate a patient relationship on such grounds.
5. The decision to end a podiatrist-patient relationship and the reasons for doing so must be communicated clearly to the patient in an objective and professional manner.

COLLEGE OF PODIATRIC SURGEONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

6. The communication of the decision to end the relationship may be made in writing or in person.
 - a. A written communication should be in the form of a registered letter.
 - b. Where the initial communication is made in person, the reason for the termination and the verbal notice must be documented in the patient's medical file; and the podiatrist should also consider sending a registered letter confirming the decision and the discussion, if applicable.
 - c. In every case a copy of any written communication must be placed in the patient's medical record.
 - d. The Podiatrist should also consider sending a letter to the patients' primary care doctor informing them of the decision to end the relationship.
7. A patient must be given a one month notice unless impracticable of the podiatrist's intent to terminate the patient relationship.
8. For the purposes of section 7 above, the reasonableness of the period of notice will depend on the particular circumstances of the case which include but are not limited to:
 - a. The patient's medical condition,
 - b. The availability of other podiatrists to provide care, and
 - c. The cooperation and deportment of the patient toward the podiatrist and practice staff.
9. Notwithstanding the above, a podiatrist must not refuse to treat a patient who is in need of urgent medical care; and must provide assistance that is warranted and practicable in the circumstances to any person with an urgent need for medical care.
10. A podiatrist who is terminating a patient relationship must assist the patient, as is reasonable and practicable in the circumstances, to find another podiatrist.
11. A podiatrist who has ended a patient relationship must respond promptly to a request including a verbal request from another podiatrist, or the patient for transfer of the patient's file.
12. A podiatrist who transfers a patient file to a new podiatrist must retain a copy of the complete file.
13. A podiatrist may charge a reasonable amount for the copying and transfer of a patient file.
14. A podiatrist must behave with the utmost decorum at all times with patients and former patients including in situations where the patient relationship is being or has been terminated.
15. In general, podiatrists must not engage in unseemly disputes with patients or third parties over unpaid podiatric fees including in situations where the podiatrist-patient relationship has been terminated. A podiatrist may in a professional manner utilize legal means to collect unpaid fees from former patients.
16. Without limiting section 16, a podiatrist must not withhold a patient's medical file on the basis of an unpaid podiatric bill including a bill for the copying and transfer of the file.