

CDHBC Update: Patient Relations Program

The College has been asked by government to update the CDHBC Patient Relations Program to reflect standards and policies that are already in place for each of the other 23 health professions in the province. Notably, this update will mean that **dental hygienists in British Columbia will no longer be permitted to provide dental hygiene care to clients with whom they have a romantic or sexual relationship. This will include spouses.** Currently, dental hygienists are the **only** health professionals in the province who remain able to treat spouses/partners; this amendment will bring the College's Patient Relations Program into accordance with the stipulations of the Health Professions Act (*HPA*), and in line with all other BC health professions.

At this time, it should be noted that the proposed changes will not restrict dental hygienists from providing services for their children, and/or any family members with whom there is no romantic or sexual relationship.

The purpose of prohibiting health professionals from practicing on a spouse or partner is grounded in circumventing professional misconduct of a sexual nature. Professional misconduct of a sexual nature is a blatant and abusive misuse of power that violates the human dignity of clients seeking care for themselves and their relatives. It is characterized as a violation of the relationship of trust and confidence that exists between clients and health care professionals.

Such professional misconduct by any registrants, providing any type of dental hygiene care, in any practice settings, may result in referral to the Inquiry Committee.



FAQs

- *What is a Patient Relations Program?*

The *HPA* stipulates that each health profession college in the province must establish a Patient Relations Program, which acts as a registrant's guide to prevention of misconduct of a sexual nature; although the focus of this guide is to prevent professional misconduct of a sexual nature with clients, the principles also apply to the professional relationships a registrant develops with colleagues and others as they provide dental hygiene care. To read more about the CDHBC Patient Relations Program, please follow [this link](#).

- *When will these changes take effect?*

The proposed changes to the Patient Relations Program were posted on May 4, 2015, for the required 90 day public consultation period. After this period, any feedback will be reviewed by the board. Pending that review, the board will make the necessary motion to file the new bylaws with the Minister of Health. The College anticipates the change will take effect in approximately November 2015. There will be significant advance notice given by the College prior to this change taking effect; in the meantime, the College encourages dental hygienists to incorporate the standard of not treating their spouse/partner into their practice immediately.

- *Why have dental hygienists been permitted to practice on spouses/partners until now?*

The provincial government has permitted each health profession in the province some time to make the necessary changes to their individual bylaws and programs in order to adhere to the requirements set out in the *HPA*. For the past few years, CDHBC chose to focus on working to meet other requirements in the *HPA*, such as the development and implementation of the Quality Assurance Program. As dental hygienists are the **only** health professionals in the province who remain able to treat spouses/partners, it is time to make this change to come into line with the *HPA* and all other regulated health professions.



FAQs

- *If I am the only hygienist in my small town/remote community, who will treat my spouse/partner?*

Patients who previously received dental hygiene care from a spouse/partner will need to arrange for dental hygiene care to be provided by a dental hygienist or dentist with whom they have no sexual relationship. This may take the form of visiting a dental hygienist in another town, arranging for a mobile dental hygienist to come provide care, or receiving dental hygiene care from a dentist.

- *If my employer tells me I can practice on my spouse/partner, am I then allowed to treat him/her?*

Your employer's permission does not supersede the legislation as laid out in the HPA and the CDHBC Bylaws. Therefore, once these proposed changes are in place, you must refrain from providing care for your spouse/partner.

- *I have obtained permission and have a letter on file from my spouse/partner, am I still able to treat him/her?*

Regardless of having obtained permission from your spouse/partner, the legislation contained in the HPA and the proposed changes to the CDHBC Bylaws specify that you may not provide care to someone with whom you have a relationship of a sexual nature.

- *Am I permitted to practice on an ex-spouse/ex-partner with whom I have had a past sexual relationship?*

Dental hygienists **may** practice on an ex-spouse or ex-partner with whom there was a past sexual or romantic relationship. However, the dental hygienist must consider each individual situation through an ethical and professional lens. Using critical thinking, the hygienist must determine that there is no risk of undue influence or imbalance of power affecting the client/care provider relationship which might prevent the client from being able to give appropriate informed consent to care.



FAQs

- *I have been treating my spouse/partner with whom I have a sexual relationship for years, with no issue – this should not apply to me.*

While the College acknowledges this change to the Patient Relations program may seem to have a prohibitive effect on the provision of dental hygiene care, restricting dental hygienists from practicing on a spouse/partner is based in legislation that exists to simultaneously protect healthcare providers from allegations of sexual misconduct, as well as to protect members of the public from abuse or exploitation by regulated health professionals. As such, the College is required to fulfill its mandate in accordance with the governing legislation.

This matter has been explored and discussed with government by the College of Dental Surgeons of BC; please find the CDSBC's *Statement on Patient Relations and Treatment of Spouses* at the following link:

http://www.cdsbc.org/~ASSETS/DOCUMENT/Statement_on_Patient_Relations_and_Treatment_of_Spouses.pdf

To view the Provincial Government's *Statement on CDSBC Patient Relations*, click on the following link:

http://www.cdsbc.org/~ASSETS/DOCUMENT/Letter_from_Ministry_of_Health_RE_Patient_Relations.pdf

