

DUTY TO ASSIST IN AN EMERGENCY

BACKGROUND:

The Code of Conduct states:

“Provide whatever appropriate assistance you can to any person with an urgent need for medical care.”

An urgent need for medical care may arise in the context of:

- a sudden injury, illness or complication demanding immediate or early medical care to save life or to prevent serious disability, pain or distress, or
- a more widespread disaster or emergency, whether or not it is formally declared as such pursuant to provincial or federal legislation.

This Statement addresses the responsibility of physicians to respond to such an occurrence.

The College believes that physicians are entitled to expect that society as a whole, and particularly public health authorities and the health care facilities within which physicians practice will support and protect health care providers who are responding to a medical emergency. This includes, but is not limited to:

- a. sharing information so that health care providers are fully informed.
- b. implementing clear policies and procedures so that health care providers are aware of what is expected of them in a medical emergency.
- c. creating and implementing policies and procedures that support safety for health care providers.
- d. providing adequate resources to support providing the care required.

The College recognizes that during a medical emergency, demands for care may overwhelm health care providers and health care institutions, and that difficult issues will arise, including resource allocation, practice liability, scope of practice, and workplace safety. Physicians are encouraged to develop an emergency response plan within their own offices and to participate in emergency response planning activities in the facilities in which they practice.

SCOPE:

This Statement applies to all physicians.

DEFINITIONS

In this Statement:

“disaster” means a calamity, however caused, which has resulted in or may result in the loss of life, or serious harm or damage to the safety, health or welfare of people.



“emergency” means a present or imminent situation or condition that requires prompt action to prevent or limit the loss of life or harm or damage to the safety, health or welfare of people.

“medical emergency” means a sudden injury, illness or complication demanding immediate or early medical care to save life or to prevent serious disability, pain or distress or it may arise in the context of a more widespread disaster or emergency, whether or not a state of emergency is formally declared pursuant to provincial or federal legislation.

REQUIREMENTS:

1. Subject to paragraph 2, a physician who is asked to attend a medical emergency must respond to render prompt and appropriate medical care to any person, whether or not the person is a current patient.
2. A physician who does not attend a medical emergency when requested to do so must have a valid reason for the failure to attend. The following circumstances are recognized by Council as potentially valid reasons for failure to attend:
 - a. The physician is already attending another medical emergency.
 - b. Attending the emergency places the personal safety of the physician at an unreasonable risk.
 - c. Any situation where the physician believes that his or her level of competence or health may compromise his or her ability to provide an appropriate level of care necessary to deal with the medical emergency. This may include, but is not limited to, excessive fatigue.
3. The physician’s ethical duty when called to an emergency is:
 - a. to provide service within the scope of his or her proper professional competence and level of skill and, if he or she has no appropriate competence or skills, to present as a person with some knowledge of emergency first aid. The physician is in the best position to know whether his or her area of competence and level of skill is sufficient to provide more than basic first aid.
 - b. to apply his or her knowledge and skill to save life, to relieve suffering and to establish the most favourable conditions for the patient’s ultimate recovery.
4. In a medical emergency, there is a professional duty to work cooperatively with:
 - a. other health care providers and to recognize the competency or skills of other health care providers
 - b. Regional Health Authorities and public health authorities within the federal and provincial Health Departments.

**A statement is a formal position of the College with which
members shall comply**

First Print Council/09-09