



The President's Letter

Dr. Christopher J.(Chip) Doig



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Dear Member:

The June 2009 Standards of Practice of the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) should stand, unchanged, in its current version with respect to self-reporting to the CPSA and the duty to report a colleague. The Alberta Medical Association (AMA) has provided you with all the information you need regarding April 1 allocation changes to health service codes.

Thoughts on CPSA proposed changes to *Standards of Practice*

The AMA appreciates and supports the CPSA's ongoing consultative approach to maintaining its *Standards of Practice* (most recently updated in June 2009). The college is currently reviewing a subset of the standards and has requested input from physicians on proposed changes to the standards with respect to self-reporting to the CPSA and the duty to report a colleague.

We encourage physicians to provide input on these matters. If you are contemplating a personal response, however, you may wonder about the AMA's position.

In terms of reporting requirements, the AMA holds the view that the current (2009) wording is satisfactory and should **not** be changed. The existing wording reflects input that the AMA provided to the CPSA during the development of the standards.

We believe that the duty to report physical, mental, or substance-abuse problems to the CPSA should occur at the point where the impairment affects the physician's ability to practise. If impairment has not yet occurred, then physicians should have the opportunity to manage the issue(s) by accessing confidential health care services in the privacy of the physician-patient relationship – just as any other patient would.

We recognize and respect the college's mandate for public safety and their commitment to maintaining health information confidentiality. There is, however, evidence that **prior to evidence of actual impairment**, regulations have a negative effect when they enforce either (i) reporting of a colleague or (ii) self-reporting of personal health issues that could limit ability to practise. Such rules may discourage physicians from seeking treatment.

The public is best protected when physicians are encouraged to seek treatment early in the course of their illness – without regulatory oversight – for their physical and emotional needs. This approach is successfully captured in the current wording of the June 2009 version of the *Standards of Practice* and therefore amendments to these sections are neither desirable nor necessary.

The AMA will be making a presentation to the Council of the college to support our views on the proposed amendments to the *Standards of Practice*. We hope that you will take this opportunity to provide the college with your views on this important matter. Details regarding the consultation process can be found at <http://www.cpsa.ab.ca/aboutus/consultation.aspx>. Email your comments to consultation@cpsa.ab.ca.

Communicating about Allocation 2010

New 2010-11 health service codes and rate changes came into effect April 1, based on the increases negotiated in the 2008-11 trilateral agreement. In order to keep AMA members fully informed about changes that will affect you, we communicated with you in several ways:

- Staff prepared a section-specific issue of *Billing Corner* to alert you to April 1 changes that will impact you. For quick reference on each section's health service code changes, an indexed copy of the April 1 *Billing Corner* is posted on the AMA's website at <http://www.albertadoctors.org/BillingCorner/April2010>.
- Practising physicians in each section received by email a copy of the section's *Billing Corner* information to ensure that you are aware of these important changes, and optimize your billings appropriately. The document contains both information important for all physicians and changes to health service codes specific to your section.
- All physicians will receive a paper copy of the complete *Billing Corner* with the monthly AMA mailing in early April.

I should remind you that it's important for all physicians to have a current copy of the Schedule of Medical Benefits (SOMB) in your offices. To obtain a free copy of the SOMB on CD, you may fax your request including your PRACID and current mailing address to Alberta Health and Wellness at 780.427.1093. You can also download a copy of the SOMB from the AMA website at <http://www.albertadoctors.org/BillingAdvice/SOMB>.

As always, I'm pleased to hear from you about your thoughts, concerns and suggestions. Letters, emails and phone calls are always welcome. My email address is president@albertadoctors.org.

Yours truly,

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President