

Medical Practice Observation/Experience

Related Standard of Practice: [Direction and Control of a Medical Practice](#) and [Supervision of Restricted Activities](#)

The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) provides advice to the profession to support physicians in implementing the *CPSA Standards of Practice*. This advice does not define a standard of practice, nor should it be interpreted as legal advice.

CPSA Advice

Participating observers are not required to be registered with, or hold a Practice Permit issued by, the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta to undertake this experience.

There are many instances in which a member of the profession may be asked to allow an observer to follow them in their practice. These observers range from high school students and university undergraduates who are considering a career in medicine to International Medical Graduates who do not meet the requirements for registration with the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta. Members who bring observers into their practice are expected to adhere to this guideline, which describes the roles and expectation of the member as well as the roles and limitations of the observer.

Participants in a Medical Practice Observation/Experience will interact with patients and will have access to private, personal patient information. For these reasons, the participants require supervision by a physician in independent practice in Alberta. The supervising physician will be responsible for all actions of the observer in their practice.

In all circumstances patient consent to allow the observer to be present, to participate in any examination or interview, and to access confidential medical information must be obtained by the supervising physician.

Participants (Observers) in a Medical Practice Observation/Experience may, with consent:

- Observe the supervising physician in the practice of medicine.
- Interview patients or patients' family members.
- Perform physical examinations* of patients in the presence of the supervising physician.
- Assist the supervising physician in the performance of medical procedures.

Participants in a Medical Practice Observation/Experience are not allowed to:

- Receive any form of remuneration from the supervising physician or clinic.
- Make entries on a patient's medical record.
- Give medical advice to a patient or make a medical diagnosis.
- Prescribe treatment.
- Take a telephone call regarding clinical matters on behalf of the supervising physician or other physicians.

- Perform medical procedures unless directly supervised by the supervising physician.
- Discharge a patient from care.
- Refer to themselves to patients, physicians, in their curriculum vitae, or on any application form, as being a “Physician Assistant,” “Assistant Physician,” “Clinical Associate,” “Clinical Assistant,” or any type of medical trainee as a consequence of or while participating in a Medical Practice Observation/Experience.

Supervising physicians who allow participants in a Medical Practice Observation/Experience into their practice must:

- In the case of students, have the observer provide evidence of current enrolment in high school or university. In the case of International Medical Graduates, have the observer provide evidence of their medical degree.
- Be present at all times when the participant interacts with a patient.
- Obtain their patients’ consent for the participant’s presence and participation in the patient care encounter. This consent discussion must clearly identify the participant’s status as, for example, a high school student, university student, or a physician not currently registered to practice in Alberta.
- Advise any facility (hospital, nursing home, etc) if they intend to have the participant accompany them on rounds or clinics in facilities outside their own private office. This advice should include the status of the participant and their expected activity while in the facility.

Supervising physicians must not:

- Rely in whole or in part on the history, physical examination, or assessment of patients performed by the participant in a Medical Practice Observation/Experience when determining the diagnosis and management of patients.
- Bill Alberta Health and Wellness on behalf of the participant.
- Remunerate a participant in a Medical Practice Observation/Experience in any way.
- Receive remuneration from a participant in a Medical Practice Observation/Experience for acting as the supervising physician.

The duration of a Medical Practice Observation/Experience is at the discretion of the supervising physician.

International Medical Graduate participants are encouraged to obtain Medical Practice Observations/Experiences with more than one physician to enhance their opportunity to make connections in the medical profession.

*We expect physical examination to include examination of a lump or bump or a swollen knee, for example.

We do not expect supervising members to allow an observer to perform a sensitive examination such as a pelvic or rectal exam or to perform a Pap smear. We cannot make rules for all situations; the supervising physician must use discretion and consider the patient’s circumstances and expressed wishes, and the observer’s experience and maturity in all situations.

¹ Replaces *Medical Practice Observation/Experience, CPSA Guideline*, Updated August 2011