

A framework for describing your credentials in advertising and promotional materials

Why did the College develop rules about how physicians can describe their specialty?

The Use of Specialist Title regulation provides requirements and restrictions as to how a physician must describe their specialty in advertising and promotional materials. This includes websites, yellow pages listings, newspaper advertisements, signage, letterhead and business cards. This framework gives the public the necessary information about physician credentials and training so that they can make informed decisions about the health-care services they seek, and the practitioners from whom they obtain those services.

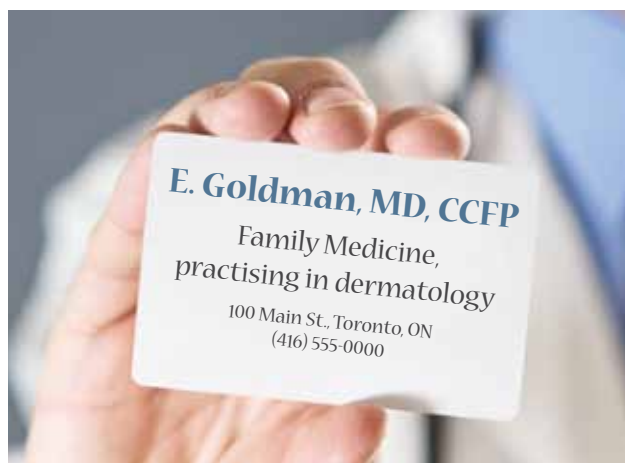
The College initiated this change several years ago to ensure quality cosmetic procedures were being provided, and public safety was protected. It soon became clear that the issue of how physicians conveyed their qualifications and training to potential patients needed to be addressed – and that it needed to be examined across the entire profession, not just with the group of physicians who provide cosmetic procedures.

Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of the regulation is that it prohibits physicians from using the title “surgery” or the term “surgeon,” or a variation or abbreviation to describe their practice unless the doctor is certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPS) in a surgical specialty or subspecialty or formally recognized in writing by the CPSO as a surgical specialist or subspecialist. Family physicians, for example, who provide cosmetic procedures can no longer describe themselves as cosmetic surgeons.

Contravening this regulation is an act of professional misconduct.

How do the rules work?

When a physician is referred to in any advertising or promotional materials, the physician’s name must be followed by either a) the term, title, or designation that the physician may use with respect to the specialty or subspecialty of the profession in which the member has



been certified by the RCPSC or the CFPC or formally recognized in writing by the CPSO or b) the title “General Practitioner.”

A recent refinement of our amendment now allows physicians to have their designatory letters (indicating academic degrees, professional certification from the RCPSC, CFPC or formal recognition from the CPSO) follow their name.

EXAMPLES OF PROPER USAGE

Joan Clark, MD, CCFP, Family Medicine

Dr. Joan Clark, Family Medicine

Tom Smith, MD, MBA, General Practitioner

Dr. Tom Smith, MBA, General Practitioner

P. Singh, MD, FRCSC, Orthopedic Surgery

L. Rousseau, MD, CPSO Recognized Specialist (Anesthesia)

What if I am a family physician who has a focus on pediatrics? How do I describe myself so that it is clear that I have a focused practice?

The College appreciates that there are physicians who have completed additional training in specific practice areas but are not certified specialists in those disciplines. In keeping with their professional obligations, physi- ►►

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- i. the term, title or designation that the member may use with respect to the specialty or subspecialty of the profession in which the member has been certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada or the College of Family Physicians of Canada or formally recognized in writing by the College, or
 - ii. the title "General Practitioner".
2. Subject to subsection (3), if one or more areas of the member's professional practice is described, the description may include a term, title or designation relating to a specialty or subspecialty for which the member is not certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada or the College of Family Physicians of Canada or formally recognized in writing by the College, but the description must,
 - i. subject to subparagraph ii, follow immediately after the term, title or designation provided for in paragraph 1, and
 - ii. be preceded by the words "practising in".
 3. Any use of a term, title or designation in respect of the member's practice of the profession must comply with this section. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1; O. Reg. 110/13, s. 1 (1).
 - (2.1) A member may, in the circumstances described in subsection (2), insert a reference to any or all of the following that apply to the member immediately following the member's name and immediately preceding the applicable reference described in subparagraph 1 i or ii of subsection (2):
 1. An academic degree.
 2. A professional certification issued by the College of Family Physicians of Canada or the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.
 3. Formal recognition in writing by the College as a specialist. O. Reg. 110/13, s. 1 (2).
 - (3) A member may not include a term, title or designation relating to a specialty or subspecialty for which the member is not certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada or the College of Family Physicians of Canada or formally recognized in writing by the College in any description of the member's professional practice unless the member has the suitable knowledge, skills and judgment to engage in the kind of medical practice so described. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (4) Except as allowed under subsection (5) or (6), no member shall use the title "surgeon" or the term "surgery", a variation, or abbreviation or an equivalent of them in another language in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (5) A member who is certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada in a surgical specialty or surgical subspecialty may use a title or term referred to in subsection (4) in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (6) A member who is formally recognized in writing by the College as a surgical specialist or surgical subspecialist may use a title or term referred to in subsection (4) in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (7) Except as allowed under subsection (8) or (9), no member shall use the term "plastic", a variation, or abbreviation or an equivalent of them in another language in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (8) A member who is certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada as a plastic surgeon may use a term referred to in subsection (7) in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (9) A member who is formally recognized in writing by the College as a plastic surgeon may use a term referred to in subsection (7) in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (10) Except as allowed under subsection (11) or (12), no member shall use the title "otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon", a variation, or abbreviation or an equivalent of them in another language in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (11) A member who is certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada as an otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon may use a title referred to in subsection (10) in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (12) A member who is formally recognized in writing by the College as an otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon may use a title referred to in subsection (10) in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (13) Except as allowed under subsection (14), no member shall use the term "facial plastic", a variation, or abbreviation or an equivalent of them in another language in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (14) A member who is an otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon described in subsection (11) or (12) may use a term referred to in subsection (13) in respect of his or her practice of the profession, but when the member is using the term in the manner described in subsection (2), the member must set out the term together with his or her title as an otolaryngologist-head and neck surgeon in the manner provided for in subsection (2). O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (15) Except as allowed under subsection (16) or (17), no member shall use the title "ophthalmologist", a variation, or abbreviation or an equivalent of them in another language in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (16) A member who is certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada as an ophthalmologist may use a title referred to in subsection (15) in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (17) A member who is formally recognized in writing by the College as an ophthalmologist may use a title referred to in subsection (15) in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (18) Except as allowed under subsection (19), no member shall use the term "oculoplastics" or "ophthalmic plastics", a variation, or abbreviation or an equivalent of them in another language in respect of his or her practice of the profession. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.
 - (19) A member who is an ophthalmologist described in subsection (16) or (17) may use a term referred to in subsection (18) in respect of his or her practice of the profession, but when the member is using the term in the manner described in subsection (2), the member must set out the term together with his or her title as an ophthalmologist in the manner provided for in subsection (2). O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1. 

cians must ensure they have the suitable knowledge, skills and judgment to practise in the areas that they describe.

If physicians wish to describe other areas of their practice, the regulation allows them to do so, provided physicians comply with certain requirements:

- The physician must still state their specialty or subspecialty or designation as a general practitioner as explained above; and
- The phrase “practising in” must precede any descriptive terms that are used. This is intended to ensure consistency in advertising and promotional materials, and that descriptive terms are not mistaken for formal specialization or sub-specialization.

EXAMPLES OF PROPER USAGE

Charles Mann, MD, CCFP, Family Medicine, practising in pediatrics

J.B. Rodrigues, MD, General Practitioner, practising in psychotherapy

Dr. E. Goldman, Family Medicine, practising in dermatology

Can I include my other credentials that I have in my advertising materials?

Physicians can include their other credentials in their advertising, if they wish, but that information cannot come before the required speciality designation and practice descriptor, if any.

EXAMPLE OF PROPER USAGE

J. Stevens, MD, General Practitioner, practising in sleep medicine, Diplomate of the American Board of Sleep Medicine

What are the practice description terms that are restricted?

Physicians cannot use the terms ‘surgeon,’ ‘surgery,’ ‘plastic,’ ‘facial plastic,’ ‘oculoplastic’ and ‘ophthalmic plastic’ unless they satisfy the conditions in the regulation.

Specifically:

- No physician can use the title “surgery” or the term “surgeon,” or a variation or abbreviation to describe their practice unless he/she is certified by the RCPSC in a surgical specialty or subspecialty or formally recognized in writing by the CPSO as a surgical specialist or subspecialist.
- No physician can use “plastic” to describe his or

her practice unless the physician is certified by the RCPSC in plastic surgery or formally recognized in writing as a plastic surgeon by the CPSO.

- No physician can use “facial plastic” to describe his or her practice unless the physician is certified by the RCPSC as an otolaryngologist – head and neck surgeon or is formally recognized in writing by the CPSO as an otolaryngologist – head and neck surgeon.

In keeping with the other requirements of the regulation, otolaryngologists – head and neck surgeons can only use “facial plastic” as a practice descriptor; it can’t replace the full name of their specialty.

- No physician can use “oculoplastic” or “ophthalmic plastic” to describe his or her practice unless he/she has been certified by the RCPSC as an ophthalmologist or is formally recognized in writing by the CPSO as an ophthalmologist. Ophthalmologists must only use these terms as a practice descriptor; they cannot use them instead of the full name of their specialty.

EXAMPLES OF PROPER USAGE

A. Jones, MD, FRCSC, Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, practising in facial plastic surgery

Bonnie Smith-Fox, MD, CCFP, Family Medicine, practising in cosmetic procedures 

Advertising Regulation

9. (1) Except as provided for in subsection (2), no member shall use a term, title or designation relating to a specialty or subspecialty of the profession in respect of his or her practice of the profession unless the member has been,

- (a) certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada in a specialty or subspecialty of the profession to which the term, title or designation relates;
- (b) certified by the College of Family Physicians of Canada in a specialty or subspecialty of the profession to which the term, title or designation relates; or
- (c) formally recognized in writing by the College as specialist in the specialty or subspecialty of the profession to which the term, title or designation relates. O. Reg. 449/10, s. 1.

(2) Subject to subsection (2.1), no member shall publish or knowingly permit the publication of the member’s name in anything that advertises, promotes or relates to the provision of professional services by the member, whether in a document, business card, website, or any other format, unless the following are complied with:

- 1. The member’s name must be immediately followed, in clear and prominent manner, and in unabbreviated form, by either,

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