



Physician Advertising

Q and A

1. What does it mean?

Recently, the College updated a regulation to ensure the information doctors communicate about their training and qualifications is consistent, clear and transparent.

2. Why was the regulation developed?

The College initiated these changes several years ago to clear up any confusion the public may have regarding how physicians convey their qualifications and training. We felt that by providing patients with easy to understand information about physician credentials and training, members of the public can make more informed decisions about the healthcare services they seek, and the practitioners from whom they obtain those services.

3. How must physicians describe their qualifications?

Under the regulation, when a physician is mentioned in any advertising or promotional materials, the physician's credentials must follow his or her academic degrees and must be listed as either a) the term, title, or designation of the specialty or subspecialty in which he or she has been certified by the RCPSC or the CFPC or formally recognized in writing by the CPSO or b) the title "General Practitioner."

Examples:

Joan Clark, MD, CCFP, Family Medicine

Tom Smith, MD, MBA, General Practitioner

P. Singh, MD, FRCSC, Orthopedic Surgery

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

4. What are the terms doctors can use?

Doctors can call themselves surgeons or use the title surgery or a variation or abbreviation to describe their practice if they are certified by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) in a surgical specialty or subspecialty. In this case the doctor would have the letters FRCSC after his or her name. Doctors may also be formally recognized in writing by the CPSO as a surgical specialist or subspecialist.

Doctors who call themselves family physicians must be certified by the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC) and would have the letters CCFP after their names. If a doctor is not certified by the CFPC, he or she must use the term "General Practitioner." Academic degrees, such as MD, MBA, PhD, etc. can also be listed. (See **Guide to Common Acronyms** at the end of this article).

Example:

D. Jones, MD, FRCS, Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, practising in facial plastic surgery

In this example, Dr. Jones is a specialist in otolaryngology (ear, nose and throat) and has limited his practice to facial plastic surgery.

5. What about physicians who practise in specific areas in which they have completed additional training but are not certified specialists?

All physicians must 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, they may do so, provided they comply with certain requirements:

- They must still state their specialty or subspecialty or designation as a General Practitioner.
- 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 subspecialization.

Examples:

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

Dr. Mann is trained in family medicine. He is not a specialist in pediatrics but has the training and skills to provide the services he is advertising.

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

Dr. Rodrigues is a general practitioner (not certified by the College of Family Physicians) and has limited her practice to psychotherapy.

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

Dr. Goldman is a family doctor, certified by the College of Family Physicians, and has limited his practice to dermatology.

6. What other credentials can physicians use in their advertising materials?

Physicians can include other credentials in their advertising, if they wish, but that information cannot come before the required speciality designation and practice description, if any. (See **Guide to Common Acronyms** at end of this article).

Example:

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

Dr. Stevens is a general practitioner (not certified by the College of Family Physicians) and has limited her practice to sleep medicine and completed training through the American Board of Sleep Medicine.

7. What questions should I ask before I have surgery or other medical procedures?

Please click here: <http://www.cpso.on.ca/policies/positions/default.aspx?id=1726> for a list of relevant questions.

8. Who do I contact if I need more information?

Call the College’s **Public Advisory Service** at **416-967-2603** or email: feedback@cpso.on.ca.

Guide to Common Acronyms

M.D. – Medical Doctor

CPSO – College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the regulatory body that governs all physicians in the province.

CCFP – Certificant of the College of Family Physicians. This means a doctor has completed a two-year residency training program in family medicine.

CFPC - College of Family Physicians of Canada, the body that governs certification in family medicine.

General Practitioner – This is the practice term to be used by a doctor who is not certified in family medicine or another specialty.

RCPC – Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, the body that governs specialty certification.

FRCS - Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons of Canada. When these initials appear after a surgeon's name, it indicates residency training in a surgical specialty – ophthalmology, otolaryngology or plastic surgery, for example.

FRCPC - Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Canada. This indicates completion of training in a medical specialty instead of a surgical specialty. Examples of medical specialists: radiologist, internal medicine, psychiatrist.

Diplomate of the American Board: Used in the U.S. to denote a physician who is board-certified in a particular specialty and holds a diploma from a specialty board such as the American Board of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (ABFPRS), the American Board of Plastic Surgery (ABPS) or the American Board of Hair Restoration Surgery (ABHRS). To gain certification, an applicant is subject to a peer review and must take exams.