

January 21, 2015

Mr. J. Amodeo, Director
Health System Labour Relations and Regulatory Policy Branch
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
12th Floor
56 Wellesley St. West
Toronto, ON M5S 2S3

Sent via email: john.amodeo@ontario.ca

Dear Mr. Amodeo:

I am writing to respond to the December 17, 2014 letter from Minister Hoskins in which he requested information on the current status and operations of the College's patient relations program, specifically with respect to preventing and dealing with the sexual abuse of patients.

The patient relations program enhances and promotes the therapeutic relationship between pharmacists/pharmacy technicians and patients. The College expects that pharmacists and pharmacy technicians will meet a high standard of behaviour and regards any act of abuse or harassment of a patient as unacceptable. The patient relations program provides resources, advice, training and support to prevent and deal with sexual abuse of patients. The program is administered by the Patient Relations Committee and a copy of activity is received annually by Council.

Educational Requirements for Members

The College regularly provides information to members on the topic of professional conduct, preventing sexual abuse and harassment and relating to mandatory reporting obligations pursuant to the *Regulated Health Professions Act* (RHPA). Over the past three years, the following articles have been published in *Pharmacy Connection*, our quarterly journal, whose main objective is to communicate information about College activities and practices to members:

June 2014: Policy on Treating Self and Family Members

Within the policy, the importance of maintaining professional boundaries was reiterated with the context of informing members of their obligations.

June 2014: Guideline on Preventing Sexual Abuse and Harassment

The guideline includes definitions of professional boundaries, sexual abuse and harassment and will assist a member with practical suggestions for maintaining those boundaries. Also included is information on mandatory reporting requirements as well as on the availability of funding for therapy and counseling for patients who have been sexually abused by a member.

Summer 2013: Mandatory Reporting

This article provided an overview of the mandatory reporting obligations for health professionals, identifying suspected sexual abuse of a patient as one of the circumstances, and the College response when a report is received.

Spring 2011: Regulating the Use of Social Media

This article encouraged members to consider the professional boundaries associated with the use of social media as well as their conduct when off-duty.

June 2011: Professional Supervision of Pharmacy Personnel

The role and obligations of the designated manager when supervising pharmacy personnel was described, including the circumstances in which a mandatory report would be filed with the College in relation to the RHPA and *Health Professions Procedural Code*.

The College has traditionally provided a one-day jurisprudence seminar for applicants and members and is currently finalizing an online module specifically related to the RHPA, including the prevention of sexual abuse of patients and all policies and guidelines related to the maintenance of professional boundaries. As well, the College's Structured Practical Training Program for students includes a section on Ethical, Legal and Professional Responsibilities with activities to support discussion between the preceptor and the student; one of the examples being sexual abuse of patients and measures to prevent its occurrence.

Guidelines for the Conduct of Members

The Guideline on Preventing Sexual Abuse and Harassment, initially drafted in 1995, was revised in 2011 and updated in 2014. This guideline explains that sexual abuse is broadly defined including any sexualisation of the professional relationship with patients, such as non-clinical comments and touching. Maintaining professional boundaries is always the responsibility of the member. Although many types of interaction are not deliberately exploitative and may be motivated by genuine feelings of caring, the harm done to patients who have been sexually abused can be severe and involve significant psychological harm for the breach of trust and lack of confidence in the pharmacy profession and health system in general. The guideline provides some practical suggestions for ensuring that professional boundaries are maintained.

The Policy on Treating Self and Family Members was developed to provide further clarity on the issue of professional boundaries at a time when members are taking on new patient care roles and collaborating more with other health professionals. The policy indicates that it is generally considered to be inappropriate to provide care or services to closely related family members, given the potential for role confusion and conflict of interest.

Training for College Staff

The College believes in leadership by example and provides training to all Council members and staff to encourage effective and respectful communication. This training promotes more effective use of verbal and written communication and teaches participants how to pick up on physical and non-physical cues. This includes the use of appropriate, sensitive language when communicating with a patient raising concerns about sexual abuse, and how to manage situations where there is potential for misunderstanding and conflict.

Provision of Information to the Public

The College website includes an explanation of the patient relations program and Committee, as well as links to the policies outlined above and the process for filing a complaint. This section is located with other information of most relevance to the public. In 2014 the Committee developed a policy, including application and consent forms, for the alternative requirements that must be satisfied in order for a person to be eligible for funding for therapy or counselling when the person was sexually abused by a member. This is in accordance with the requirement for the Committee to administer the College's victim compensation fund.

I assure the Minister that the College will continue to ensure that individuals who bring forward complaints regarding allegations involving sexual abuse of a patient are treated sensitively and compassionately. Further, the College will fully participate in and cooperate with the Minister's Task Force on the Prevention of Sexual Abuse of Patients. We will continue to affirm and reinforce Ontario's ongoing commitment to a zero tolerance approach to sexual abuse of patients by regulated health professionals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marshall Moleschi', written in a cursive style.

Marshall Moleschi, R.Ph., B.Sc.(Pharm), MHA
CEO and Registrar