

PHYSICIAN – PATIENT DATING POLICY

THE POLICY

In September of 2006 the College passed the following policy concerning sexual relationships between naturopathic physicians and patients:

- Any kind of dating or sexual conduct between a naturopathic physician and a patient is always prohibited. For the duration of the physician/patient relationship, it is the naturopathic physician's responsibility to refrain from such unethical behaviour, even when the patient appears to consent to or initiate an intimate relationship.
- It is unethical to terminate treatment in order to start a relationship.
- There should be an interval of at least 1 year between the ending of a physician/patient relationship and the initiation of a personal, intimate relationship. The 1-year ban diminishes the likelihood of undo influence of the previous professional relationship.
Sexual conduct between a naturopathic physician and a former patient is unethical unless it is clear that:
 - a. the patient understands that the physician/patient relationship has ended; and
 - b. the patient is capable of consenting.Sexual or romantic relationships with former patients are inappropriate and unethical when the sexual involvement results from or appears to result from the use or exploitation of the trust, knowledge, influence, or emotions derived from the previous professional relationship.
- Where the physician/patient relationship has, at any time, involved significant emotional counseling or psychotherapy, there is a lifelong ban on any kind of dating or sexual involvement. "Significant emotional counseling" in this context is defined as a form of treatment in which the naturopathic physician engages in counseling to a depth that increases the potential for vulnerability or dependency on the part of the patient, which subsequently may affect the patient's ability to act freely.
- Naturopathic physicians should avoid romantic or sexual involvement with key third parties if the third party is responsible for making decisions which impact on the health and welfare of the patient.
- The relationship between the naturopathic physician and patient is based on trust and it is the naturopathic physician's ethical responsibility to consider the patient's welfare as paramount and place it above their own self-interest.

ADVICE

Naturopathic physicians seeking advice on whether or not a relationship with a former patient is appropriate may call the Patient Relations Committee or make a request to the College Board for clarification or guidance with respect to his or her rights and responsibilities.

It should be noted, however; that no advice or guidance offered by the Committee or the College can guarantee that a naturopathic physician will not be the subject of a complaint lodged by a patient or former patient. Each complaint, by law, must be considered by the College on the merits of the case as to whether the naturopathic physician's conduct was appropriate.

*** This policy does not provide guidelines on whether or not it is appropriate for the naturopathic physician to treat his or her spouse, common-law partner, or person who they are dating or in a sexual relationship with prior to the commencement of the medical treatment.*