



College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia

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CHIEF CORONER

October 30, 2019

VIA MAIL

Ms. Lisa Lapointe
Chief Coroner
Province of British Columbia
PO Box 9259
STN PROV GOVT
Victoria BC V8W9J4

Dear Ms. Lapointe,

Re: Verdict at Inquest into the deaths of Brian GEISHEIMER, Sarah CHARLES, and Sebastien ABDI

Please excuse a very delayed response to your letter dated August 29, 2017. You request responses to recommendations 11-12 and 13 in the report to form part of the public record of this inquest.

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia shares the concern that patients at potential risk of suicide receive the best possible medical care. As you know, the mandate and authority of the College are to regulate the practices of our registrants, the physicians and surgeons of the province, as set out in the *Health Professions Act*. The objects of a college are listed in *HPA* section 16(2) and include establishing and enforcing practice standards and maintaining a continuing competency program.

With specific reference to the recommendations in the report:

- 11. Consider enhancing the standards of documentation to require specific evidence (including chronology) of the care provider's assessment of suicide risk and development of a collaborative safety plan.**

General standards for documentation are codified in a College Board standard on the College website, titled: *"Medical Records, Data Stewardship and Confidentiality of Personal Health Information"*. Documentation requirements for the many specific and specialized areas of practice in which our 13,000 registrants are engaged are constantly evolving in light of emerging evidence. In the event of an investigation of physician performance and competence, the College seeks the opinions of experts to inform the decision. With that as background, for physicians assessing patients at potential risk of suicide, I believe it accurate to state that the recommendation describes the expected standard in current practice.

12. Consider mandating annual suicide risk assessment management re-training for health care and behavioural health professionals in order to maintain registration.

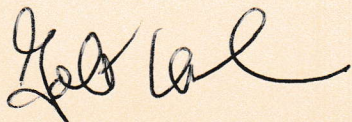
Physicians and surgeons are required to meet the continuing professional development requirements of national accrediting colleges (the College of Family Physicians of Canada and the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada for family physicians and specialists respectively). The College has neither the wisdom nor the authority to impose specifically prescriptive educational requirements as a condition of registration. Mandated periodic educational requirements as conditions of privileging are imposed by hospital and health authority departments and programs, based on direction from medical staff divisions and departments. For example, physicians who deliver babies may be required to maintain certification in neonatal resuscitation. We must defer the issue of mandatory training to relevant service delivery programs. I will add that it is generally not feasible to mandate educational activities annually, given the broad range of compelling and complex competencies required of physicians in their practices.

13. Consider creating an education program designed to educate all health care staff on the practical application of all the privacy laws regarding the sharing of health care information and mandate annual training and retraining as part of maintaining professional registration.

Striking a balance between the right of adults with capacity to direct that healthcare information not be disclosed without their consent with the information needs of families and others assisting in their care in the community is a constant challenge for health care staff. Determining the correct course varies from case to case. We believe that frontline staff in hospitals require the supportive counsel of privacy experts in their management of discharge planning given the complexity. The advice is generally required on a just-in-time basis. From an educational perspective, we are not optimistic that mandated training is the answer and, as noted above, the College lacks the authority to make specified training a condition of licensure. Beyond the hospital, BC physicians have immediate access to expert guidance by calling the CMPA or the College. Online resources like the Guide to the *Mental Health Act* are also helpful.

I trust these comments will help complete the record of the inquest into the tragic deaths of these three people and again apologize for my tardiness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J.G. Wilson', with a stylized, cursive script.

J.G. Wilson, MD, MSc, FCFP, FRRMS
Senior Deputy Registrar
Complaints and Practice Investigations Department

JGW/le