

## **SUMMARY**

### **Dr. Michael Frank Weatherhead (CPSO# 22623)**

#### **1. Disposition**

On August 2 2017, the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee (“the Committee”) required Dr. Weatherhead (General Practice) to appear before a panel of the Committee to be cautioned with respect to inappropriate narcotic and controlled substance prescribing and unprofessional conduct with patients.

The Committee also accepted an undertaking from Dr. Weatherhead, executed July 20, 2017.

#### **2. Introduction**

The College received information from the Narcotics Monitoring System (“NMS”) raising concerns regarding Dr. Weatherhead’s narcotics prescribing and subsequently the Committee approved the Registrar’s appointment of investigators to conduct a review of Dr. Weatherhead’s prescribing practices.

#### **3. Committee Process**

As part of the College’s investigation, the Registrar appointed a Medical Inspector to review a number of Dr. Weatherhead’s patient charts, interview Dr. Weatherhead, and submit a written report to the Committee.

A Panel of the Committee constituted to consider cases that include narcotics prescribing issues, consisting of public and physician members, met to review the relevant records and documents related to the investigation. The Committee always has before it applicable legislation and regulations, along with policies that the College has developed, which reflect the College’s professional expectations for physicians practising in Ontario. Current versions of

these documents are available on the College's website at [www.cpsso.on.ca](http://www.cpsso.on.ca), under the heading "Policies & Publications."

#### 4. Committee's Analysis

The Committee considered the report of the Medical Inspector, who concluded that Dr. Weatherhead failed to meet the standard of practice in a majority of the charts reviewed, that he demonstrated a lack of knowledge, skill and judgement in a number of areas, and that his clinical practice, behaviour or conduct exposed, or was likely to expose, his patients to harm or injury in approximately half the charts reviewed. The Committee also considered Dr. Weatherhead's response to the Medical Inspector's report, in which Dr. Weatherhead described education he has undertaken or will undertake to improve his narcotics prescribing and the changes that he has made to his narcotics prescribing.

As a result of this investigation, the Committee was concerned about Dr. Weatherhead's prescribing; he gave refills of opioids without documentation, prescribed opioids without indication, gave the same patient multiple addictive drugs, failed to recognize aberrant drug behaviour and did not enforce narcotics contracts with patients.

The Committee was also concerned that while Dr. Weatherhead initially outlined the steps he has taken to improve his practice, he subsequently decided that it was best to cease prescribing narcotics and controlled drugs and indicated that he was resigning these prescribing privileges. Dr. Weatherhead put a sign in his office giving patients' one month's notice about his decision. In the Committee's view, physicians who plan to cease prescribing narcotics or controlled drugs must ensure that they properly taper patients who are on these medications off of them before they discontinue care. One month is simply not sufficient time to taper patients off of narcotics or controlled drugs. Dr. Weatherhead deserted hundreds of patients and caused unnecessary harm by putting them at a risk of living with untreated pain, withdrawal symptoms and incentive to obtain illicit drugs. These patients may not find another physician to prescribe

them narcotics or controlled drugs; it is possible that no one is monitoring them now or providing them with any follow-up care. Dr. Weatherhead's behaviour was also not an appropriate way to respond to the College's efforts to reinforce the current opioid guidelines and educate physicians during an opioid crisis. The College expects physicians to work to improve their prescribing to the benefit of patients.

The Committee accepted Dr. Weatherhead's undertaking to resign his prescribing privileges of narcotics and controlled drugs. The undertaking is posted on the College's public register. However, given the concerns that the Medical Inspector noted in Dr. Weatherhead's practice, and the manner in which Dr. Weatherhead chose to respond to the concerns that were raised, the Committee determined that it was also appropriate to require Dr. Weatherhead to appear before a panel of the Committee to be cautioned, so the Committee may impress upon him its concerns about his narcotics prescribing practices and his unprofessional conduct with patients.