

SUMMARY

DR. HUGHES (CPSO# 31872)

1. Disposition

On February 22, 2016, the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee (“the Committee”) required cardiologist Dr. Hughes to appear before a panel of the Committee to be cautioned with respect to following the College policy on *Ending a Physician-Patient Relationship*, including sending a registered letter to the patient.

2. Introduction

A patient complained to the College that Dr. Hughes failed to provide advice or an appropriate schedule after prescribing new medications, leading to three emergency room visits over two weeks; prescribed medication to treat high blood pressure though the patient did not have high blood pressure; and inappropriately terminated the patient from the Cardiac Rhythm Device Clinic (“the Device Clinic”).

Dr. Hughes responded that he adjusted the patient’s medications after the patient experienced atrial fibrillation. He explained to the patient the reason he was changing the medications and instructed the patient on how to take them. He did prescribe “blood pressure” medications but this was to treat heart failure and left ventricular function, as these medications treat all of these conditions. He is also Medical Director of the Device Clinic and so after the patient complaint, he terminated care at this clinic, which he oversees.

3. Committee Process

As part of this investigation, the Committee retained an Independent Opinion provider (“IO provider”) who specializes in cardiology. The IO provider reviewed the entire written investigative record and submitted a written report to the Committee.

An Internal Medicine Panel of the Committee, consisting of public and physician members, met to review the relevant records and documents related to the complaint, as well as College policies and relevant legislation.

4. Committee's Analysis

Though Dr. Hughes had a bona fide rationale for terminating care, the Committee is concerned that Dr. Hughes failed to follow the College's policy on *Ending the Physician-Patient Relationship* as he did not notify the patient in writing and by registered mail that he was terminated the relationship.

The Policy sets out the College's expectations of a physician who ends the physician patient relationship. These expectations include:

- 1. Notify the patient of your decision to end the physician-patient relationship by letter sent by registered mail...Physicians may also discuss this decision with the patient, if appropriate...

Aside from requiring Dr. Hughes to appear before a panel to be cautioned regarding termination, the Committee also advised Dr. Hughes to order a creatinine level and obtain the test result before starting a patient on Dabigatran (a novel anticoagulant for this patient). The Committee had no other concerns with Dr. Hughes's assessment and medication choices.

Regarding Dr. Hughes prescribing, the IO provider opined that Dr. Hughes met the standard of care. Though failing to obtain blood work to determine the patient's creatinine levels prior to, or shortly after, initiating a novel anticoagulant would have been below the standard of care, in this case the IO provider noted that Dr. Hughes ordered blood work but the patient did not attend the laboratory to have blood drawn in a timely manner.

The Committee disagreed with the IO provider's conclusions. Dr. Hughes should have a system in place to ensure important test results are reviewed in a timely manner, and if missing, that he take appropriate action. Dr. Hughes did not review the patient's blood work until a month and a half after starting the new anticoagulant, and thus was not aware of the patient's creatinine levels and thus their renal function. Though in this case the blood work was normal, not being aware of a patient's renal function and adjusting the anticoagulant dose accordingly can be fatal.