

## **SUMMARY**

### **DR. MICHAEL ANTHONY PINTO (CPSO# 51345)**

#### **1. Disposition**

On November 7, 2018, the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee (the Committee) required rheumatologist and internist Dr. Pinto to appear before a panel of the Committee to be cautioned with respect to the management of the patient's liver disease and not referring the patient to a hepatologist.

#### **2. Introduction**

In April 2017, the patient was diagnosed with cirrhosis of the liver with ascites. The patient complained to the College that Dr. Pinto failed to provide her adequate care. Specifically, he failed to follow up and carry out further investigations when blood test results indicated that she was developing issues related to her liver function; failed to provide updates to her family physician after providing his initial consultation note; and failed to adjust the dosage or discontinue the prescribing of methotrexate over a four year period given the blood test results.

Dr. Pinto responded that, in retrospect, he could have investigated further to identify whether there was sufficient concern to refer the patient to a hepatologist or to take some other step. He indicated that he sent all blood work and test results to the patient's family physician, but acknowledged he could have explained his thought process with respect to the patient's liver function test results better. He did not reduce or wean the patient off methotrexate because she was reportedly doing well on it and the liver function tests did not come back as consistently elevated with a pattern of increase over time.

### **3. Committee Process**

A General Panel of the Committee, consisting of public and physician members, met to review the relevant records and documents related to the complaint. 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.cpso.on.ca](http://www.cpso.on.ca), under the heading "Policies & Publications."

### **4. Committee's Analysis**

The Committee notes that methotrexate treatment can lead to elevated transaminase results in many patients. While mild elevation is not unusual, liver damage is more common in patients where there are other risk factors. In this case, the patient was also taking leflunomide and had a fatty liver. In 2015, the elevations started becoming more severe. The levels fluctuated but there was no sustained normality. In the Committee's view, Dr. Pinto should have referred the patient to a hepatologist and/or weaned her methotrexate around this time. There was ample time to make a referral between 2015, when the patient had severely elevated transaminases, and 2017, when she presented with cirrhosis and ascites.

Dr. Pinto stated that he sent a consultation letter and follow-up letter to the patient's family physician in 2013 and 2015, mentioning that the liver function test was mildly elevated. In the Committee's view, if Dr. Pinto expected the family doctor to follow up on the liver abnormality, he should have verified with the patient at the next visit that her family doctor had received his letters and started investigations. In addition, based on our review, Dr. Pinto's letters are non-specific and do not stress or quantify the abnormalities or suggest actions to take. In the Committee's view, Dr. Pinto did not communicate adequately with the family doctor.

Overall, the Committee believes that Dr. Pinto missed multiple opportunities to recognize the patient's evolving liver issues and failed to respond appropriately to her abnormal liver results.

The Committee is aware that Dr. Pinto resigned his membership in the College, effective June 1, 2018, and can, therefore, no longer practice medicine in Ontario. However, the Committee identified concerns in this case regarding Dr. Pinto's care, which we believe would be satisfied by requiring him to attend at the College to be cautioned in person.