

SUMMARY

Dr. Sarita Singh (CPSO#72363)

1. Disposition

On July 19, 2018, the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee (the Committee) required family physician Dr. Singh to appear before a panel of the Committee to be cautioned with respect to the proper assessment of dizziness, the use of hypertensive medications in the ER setting, and the reassessment of a patient returning with ongoing new-onset headache, and requested that she provide the Committee, in advance of attending, with a written report about the assessment of dizziness and new-onset headache.

2. Introduction

A family member of the late patient complained to the College that Dr. Singh had, on two occasions in a hospital Emergency Room (ER), failed to adequately assess, investigate, refer, diagnose and treat the Patient's head injury in a timely manner; misdiagnosed the Patient with migraine headaches; failed to recognize and adequately investigate the Patient's deteriorating condition when he returned to the ER subsequently, and discharged him in an unstable condition; inappropriately prescribed Gravol and hypertensive medications; and mismanaged the Patient's head injury, resulting in his early demise.

Dr. Singh responded that while her care generally met the standard, she acknowledged that there was room for improvement in her documentation. She advised the Committee of the continuing medical education she was undertaking in Medical Record-Keeping and in neurological assessments and diagnosis of neurological conditions.

3. Committee Process

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

A Family Practice 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, under the heading "Policies & Publications."

4. Committee's Analysis

If Dr. Singh had known that the patient's history included a fall involving a blow to the head, the Committee would have expected her to order imaging (CT scan or MRI), possibly at the first ER visit and definitely at the second. It appeared, however, that she did not know about the patient's fall. If she was not aware of the patient's history, it would be more reasonable for Dr. Singh to not appreciate the need for further imaging.

Generally, physicians should have a higher index of suspicion when a patient returns to the ER for a second time with the same or similar symptoms, as in this patient's case. When the patient returned with vomiting and dizziness, Dr. Singh still diagnosed a tension headache, with no apparent consideration of other differential diagnoses. The Committee was concerned about Dr. Singh's reassessment of this patient, specifically that she did not perform/document physical examination or consider further investigations.

While the IO provider was somewhat supportive of Dr. Singh's overall care, the Committee agreed with the IO provider that Dr. Singh did not complete an appropriate assessment of the patient's dizziness.

The Committee was puzzled as to why the patient was administered blood pressure medication upon presenting with dizziness, even before Dr. Singh saw him.

The Committee was concerned that Dr. Singh displayed a low level of insight regarding her care in this case. Further, Dr. Singh had a poor quality chart, inadequate documentation of the patient's history and physical, and prescribed blood pressure medication without documented justification. Taking into account Dr. Singh's history with the College, the Committee decided to require Dr. Singh to attend at the College to be cautioned in person.