

**SUMMARY of the Decision of the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee  
(the Committee)**  
(Information is available about the complaints process [here](#) and about the Committee [here](#))

**Dr. Celeste Jean Thirlwell (CPSO #76629)**

**INTRODUCTION**

The College received information raising concerns about psychiatrist Dr. Thirlwell's prescribing to a complex patient at extremely high risk for drug abuse, as well as her lack of professionalism in failing to respond to telephone messages from another physician within the patient's circle of care. Subsequently, the Committee approved the Registrar's appointment of investigators to conduct a broad review of Dr. Thirlwell's practice.

**COMMITTEE'S DECISION**

A General Panel of the Committee considered this matter at its meeting of October 16, 2019. The Committee required Dr. Thirlwell to attend at the College to be cautioned in person for prescribing opioids as treatment for sleep disorders, for not recognizing substance use disorder, for practising out of scope with respect to chronic pain management, and for lack of professionalism in not responding to the CPSO and other health care providers. The Committee also accepted two undertakings from Dr. Thirlwell related to practice restrictions (resignation of prescribing privileges) and professional education (in medical record-keeping and safer opioid prescribing).

**COMMITTEE'S ANALYSIS**

As part of this investigation, the Registrar appointed an independent Assessor to review Dr. Thirlwell's care of the patient and submit a written report to the Committee. The Assessor opined that Dr. Thirlwell's pain management and opioid prescribing fell below the standard of practice of the profession, that she exhibited a lack of knowledge, skill, and judgement, and that she posed a risk of harm to the patient. The Assessor concluded that pain management was outside the scope of Dr. Thirlwell's education and training. This view led to a separate investigation into the issue of Dr. Thirlwell's scope of practice with respect to pain management.

Dr. Thirlwell entered into two separate undertakings to address the shortcomings in her practice identified in this and the concurrent investigation into her scope of practice. The first restricts her practice such that she cannot prescribe opioids and specifies that she will abide by the College's change of scope policy if she chooses to practise chronic pain management in

future. The second undertaking relates to an individualized education plan to complete professional education in opioid prescribing and medical record-keeping.

When Dr. Thirlwell entered into her undertakings with the College, she was aware that, because of the serious nature of the shortcomings identified in her practice, the Committee would also require her to attend at the College to be cautioned in this and the related investigation.