

SUMMARY of the Decision of the Inquiries, Complaints and Reports Committee (the Committee)

Information about the complaints process and the Committee is available at:
<https://www.cpso.on.ca/Public/Services/Complaints>

Dr. Ireen Makram Aziz Girgis (CPSO #85653)

INTRODUCTION

The College received information from a family member of patients receiving care at a medical clinic (Clinic A) where Dr. Girgis practised raising concerns about the administrative practices at the clinic. In particular, the family member was concerned that several patients may have been pressured into having prescriptions filled at a particular pharmacy (Pharmacy A). Investigations revealed that a person closely related to Dr. Girgis, Mr. X, is the President and an officer of the corporation that manages Pharmacy A. In addition, the manager of another pharmacy reported a significant reduction in the number of prescriptions received from Dr. Girgis and having received complaints from several patients who felt pressured by Dr. Girgis to have their prescriptions filled elsewhere. In the course of the investigation, the Committee identified concerns about Dr. Girgis' high incidence of prescribing compound creams, and her prescribing to family members.

Subsequently, the Committee approved the Registrar's appointment of investigators to conduct a broad review of Dr. Girgis' practice.

COMMITTEE'S DECISION

A General Panel of the Committee considered this matter at its meeting of January 16, 2019. The Committee required Dr. Girgis to attend at the College to be cautioned in person with respect to treating family members and prescribing compounded formulas. The Committee requested that Dr. Girgis review the College policy, *Physician Treatment of Self, Family Members, or Others Close to Them* and provide the College with a written report about the policy, in advance of attending for the caution. The Committee also issued advice to Dr. Girgis about disclosing a potential conflict of interest in a clear manner.

COMMITTEE'S ANALYSIS

Prescribing compound creams

The Committee had concerns regarding Dr. Girgis' prescribing of compound creams. It was not satisfied by Dr. Girgis' explanation for her higher incidence of prescribing these costly compound medications (which were largely being dispensed at the pharmacy in which Mr. X had an ownership interest), when there were cheaper alternative formulations available for patients, and given that it was not clear that the compound medications were even effective.

Prescribing to family members

The Committee also had concerns about Dr. Girgis' numerous incidences of issuing prescriptions for her family members. It was not satisfied that Dr. Girgis' explanations provided sufficient justification for the large number of prescriptions she provided to her family, particularly given that the majority of the medications prescribed would not be considered emergent/urgent in nature and the fact that the family members reportedly had family physicians. In the Committee's view, Dr. Girgis clearly breached the College's policy against prescribing to family members, and did so repetitively.

The Committee was of the opinion that the caution was necessary to address the above prescribing issues.

Conflict of interest

The Committee stated that while it was clear that a disproportionate number of prescriptions by Dr. Girgis were filled at Pharmacy A, it had no evidence before it to support the conclusion that she was directing patients to use Pharmacy A, or otherwise inappropriately influencing patients to use Pharmacy A, which she clearly and consistently denied doing.

However, the Committee was concerned that the information before it suggested that Dr. Girgis' patients generally did not appreciate the relationship between Dr. Girgis and the pharmacy directly adjacent to her practice (i.e. that Mr. X has an ownership interest in the pharmacy). It noted that while Dr. Girgis apparently provided patients with a paper copy of their prescriptions and now has a sign in the clinic advising that it is not affiliated with/recommending any particular pharmacy and that patients can fill prescriptions at the pharmacy of their choosing, the sign makes no mention of Mr. X's association with the adjacent pharmacy. In the Committee's view, this raised at least the appearance of a conflict of interest. The Committee therefore felt it was appropriate to provide advice to Dr. Girgis about ensuring that she takes the steps necessary to avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest.