

Sexual and Reproductive Health Counselling by Health Care Professionals

This policy statement was prepared by the Social and Sexual Issues Committee, reviewed by the Family Physicians Advisory Committee and the Clinical Practice Gynaecology Committee, and approved by the Executive and Council of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada.

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Disclosure statements have been received from all members of the committees.

GENERAL SEXUAL HEALTH

With respect to the general sexual health needs of their patients, health care professionals should

1. Assess the sexual and reproductive health status and needs of their patients.
2. Provide patients with current information, education, and counselling regarding sexual health.
3. Acknowledge their patients' feelings, attitudes, and norms that may be obstacles to the achievement of individual sexual health, and they should use this information to assist patients in establishing realistic goals.

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4. Provide patients with the opportunity to learn the skills needed to achieve sexual and reproductive health. Motivational interviewing and other counselling techniques may be employed to encourage patients to adopt healthier sexual practices.
5. Participate in continuing education to maintain knowledge and practice competence with respect to sexual and reproductive health.
6. Be aware and respectful of their patients' values and lifestyles with respect to sexual behaviour.
7. Be aware of how their own values may influence their practices.
8. Be aware of resources that may be accessed by women in need of specialized sexual and reproductive health care. These may include
 - contraceptive education and care
 - pregnancy termination
 - Pap smear
 - prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up of sexually transmitted infections and education about their prevention and effects
 - preventive education and therapeutic intervention for victims of sexual coercion
 - assistance for women experiencing sexual dysfunction
 - treatment of infertility.

PREGNANCY TERMINATION/ABORTION

With respect to pregnancy termination/abortion, health care professionals should

1. Be aware of how women can access pregnancy termination, and they must offer timely referrals.
2. Not be compelled to perform pregnancy terminations if this practice is contrary to their beliefs, nor should they be discriminated against if they do provide these services.
3. Be aware that they have an obligation to provide timely, respectful, and appropriate care to women presenting with complications arising from abortion.

RESOURCES

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