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## The Atlantic Provinces Medical Peer Review



### The Peer Review Process

The Atlantic Provinces Medical Peer Review Program is an educational process sponsored co-operatively by the Medical Societies and Licensing Authorities in New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland & Labrador. The program has been operational since 1993, and has now assessed more than 3500 physicians throughout the region. In the first few years, assessment was confined to Family Physicians. Since then, however, we have added a number of specialty fields, and hope ultimately to be able to review all eligible physicians every five to seven years.

Confidentiality is a watchword of the program. Physicians licensed in the three provinces have been assigned an APMPR number which is the only identifier on assessment reports. As well, legislation provides for the protection of peer assessment results through the Medical Act and the Evidence Act in each province.

It is a fundamental principle of our program that the assessor should be a peer engaged in a practice similar to that of the physician being assessed. Most assessors have had their individual practices assessed, and have been carefully screened before being invited to participate as members of the assessment pool. They are sensitive to the professional judgement of individual physicians, conscious of the concerns about confidentiality, and committed to making the peer review process a positive and rewarding experience for those involved.

All physicians selected for peer review are requested to complete a "Pre-Screening Form" which provides APMPR with relevant information about the physician and the field of practice. This information is used to determine whether a physician is currently eligible for peer review. Physicians who are determined to be eligible are required to complete a more in-depth "Physician Questionnaire" which provides APMPR and the assessor assigned to that physician with a better understanding of the practice.

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Physicians selected for assessment may be asked to participate in either an onsite or offsite review. In an onsite assessment, an assessor is named to visit the practice, a process which usually requires about three hours, and includes a review of patient files selected at random by the assessor. Following the file review, the assessor will meet with the physician for about an hour, to ensure that the impressions reached from the review are accurate. Although physicians may be present for the entire process if desired, their presence is only actually required for the interview portion.

Following the assessment visit, a report is submitted by the assessor to our Assessment Review Committee, a group comprised of physicians representing each of the APMR member provinces. This committee reviews the report, and makes a decision on whether the practice is satisfactory, or what improvements may be required. Each assessment is categorized as follows:

- # Category 1: practice satisfactory - no further action
- # Category 2: practice deficiencies identified - reassessment require
- # Category 3: practice deficiencies identified - interview required

Physicians who have been assessed receive a copy of this report and may, in some cases, be asked to meet with the Assessment Review committee. It is important to note that our experience has shown that over 80% of physicians assessed have been rated in the first category.

In an offsite assessment, physicians are asked to submit the Physician Questionnaire, a brief autobiography, and copies of five patient charts, chosen from among patients with specific disease entities relative to the practice. For example, among those submitted by Family Physicians will be Hypertension, Chronic Pain and Type II Diabetes. For Paediatricians, the list includes Autism, Asthma and Seizure Management. An experienced APMR assessor will evaluate the structure and contents of the charts, as well as the management of the disease entities, to determine if the practice appears to be satisfactory, or whether an onsite visit is required.

All physicians who are assessed are invited to complete post-visit questionnaires, many of which are returned each year. We have been pleased to observe from those questionnaires that after a physician overcomes an initial apprehension about the process, the majority have found peer assessment to be a worthwhile experience.