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# Gradual Return to Practice Framework

## Introduction

The College of Pharmacists of Manitoba's (College) mandate is to serve and protect the public interest in pharmacy practice. The College and the Complaints Committee takes all complaints seriously, and recognizes the uniqueness and complexity of complaints with aspects of mental health and substance abuse.

This framework serves as a guidance document for the Complaints Committee in monitoring registrants who have either had an interim suspension imposed, or voluntarily surrendered their practicing pharmacist licence.

A gradual return to practice is imperative to support the registrant and ensure they are able to practice in a safe and healthy manner, adjusting to the physical, mental and emotional stresses associated with returning to practice, for a greater likelihood of long-term success and patient safety.

It remains the first priority of the College and the Committee that the interest and safety of the public be maintained. This is accomplished by a supervised slow and gradual return to practice for the registrant, with incremental reductions of practice restrictions over a long period of time. Practice restrictions are amended as the registrant demonstrates consistent success in accountability, self-awareness, and progression through an established treatment plan. Once a registrant demonstrates they are able to achieve safe practice at one stage of practice restrictions, the Complaints Committee will consider a gradual reduction in the restrictiveness of the practice conditions in place.

## Monitoring Program

### Pre-requisites

Benchmark assessments and/or screening must be completed prior to the registrant regaining their practicing licence with conditions. This may include, but not be limited to:

1. mental health and/or addiction assessment by CBI Health and initiation of the recommendations of the assessor
2. baseline substance screening of both hair and urine samples
3. meetings conducted jointly with the registrant, their medical supports, and College staff
4. initial reporting from medical supports



## **Undertaking**

Every gradual return to practice is formalized and customized in an undertaking which must be reviewed in a meeting with College staff and the registrant.

No registrant involved in a gradual return to practice or subject to an undertaking is eligible to hold the position of a pharmacy manager or engage in precepting an intern, student or pharmacy technician applicant, until such time as the Committee determines it appropriate to remove this condition.

### **What is in an undertaking between the pharmacist and the College?**

The undertaking is the contract signed when the pharmacist enters a monitoring program and gradual return to practice. It may include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Duration of time the registrant must be monitored and how monitoring will be conducted
- Requirements for random drug and/or alcohol screening, support group participation, treatment evaluations, self-reflection, and reporting from various mental health and/or addiction specialists
- What will occur if the pharmacist relapses or does breach the contract

By signing the undertaking, the registrant agrees that any breach of the contract may result in the interim suspension or necessitate the voluntary surrender of their practicing licence. The undertaking does not prohibit the College from taking disciplinary action, if appropriate.

### **What are the elements of an undertaking?**

Pharmacists who are approved by the Committee to embark on a gradual return to practice are required to openly participate in treatment as recommended by specialists in the field of mental health and/or addiction to ensure that the complexities of their disease state are managed appropriately.

The elements necessary to ensure the health and well-being of the pharmacist and the public may include, but are not limited to:

1. scheduled regular treatment sessions with a mental health and/or addiction specialist with reporting directly to College staff
2. scheduled minimum engagement with group or community support networks
3. random drug and alcohol screening or hair and/or urine screening
4. follow-up meetings with the Committee
5. limited practice hours and/or limited practice site(s)
6. reporting from the registrant's pharmacy manager directly to College staff

### **Are there costs involved in an undertaking and gradual return to practice?**

There are costs involved in establishing the prerequisites for embarking on a gradual return to practice, and progression through a gradual return to practice. All costs associated are the responsibility of the registrant. The registrant must maintain their financial accounts with all required supports and service providers to ensure the service and support continues as required. Any lapse in treatment, or missed session or substance screening, is considered a breach of the undertaking and may impact the registrant's eligibility to maintain their practicing licence.



Further, the College may assign costs associated with monitoring a registrant's practicing conditions, to the registrant.

### **How and When are Conditions Amended?**

Over the course of months of demonstrated success and compliance with the elements of the undertaking, a registrant may request that particular licensing conditions are amended to be made less restrictive. The Committee would consider the request based on, but not limited to, the following benchmarks:

1. has the registrant missed any reporting during the course of the undertaking?
2. has the registrant communicated open and honestly with all involved supports and the Committee?
3. were any concerns identified through substance screening?
4. were any concerns or recommendations submitted by the registrant's mental health and addiction specialists?
5. was authenticity demonstrated by the registrant in treatment and recovery?
6. what measurable and demonstratable actions or benchmarks would support the loosening of practice restrictions and indicate that loosening the applicable condition would not likely present a serious risk to the public?

As stated in the introduction, practice restrictions are amended as the registrant demonstrates consistent success in accountability, self-awareness, and progression through an established treatment plan. Once a registrant demonstrates they are able to achieve safe practice at one stage of practice restrictions, the Complaints Committee will consider a gradual reduction in the restrictiveness of the practice conditions in place.

### **Timeframe of a Gradual Return to Practice**

A registrant who is approved to embark of a gradual return to practice will be monitored for a minimum of five years. Over the course of that time, it is anticipated that the practice restriction will gradually be loosened until the completion of the gradual return, and the registrant is ultimately able to practice without any licensing conditions.

### **Breach of an Undertaking**

Breaches of an undertaking are serious and frequently pose a risk to patient safety. The Committee considers several factors related to the breach including how the breach came to be known (ex: self reported by registrant, positive drug screening without self-reporting, failing to report for treatment session or screening etc.), the risk to the public, risk to the registrant, and current status of the registrant. The Committee will often meet with the registrant and then deliberate to establish a course of action. The Committee may accept a voluntary surrender of the practicing licence, or in situations of serious risk to the public, may direct the Registrar to interim suspend the registrant's licence.

A breach in the undertaking may result in the recommencement of the five-year monitoring timeframe. In cases of repeated breaches or, multiple voluntary surrendering or interim suspension of a practicing



licence, the five-year time frame may extend the monitoring and gradual return to practice of the registrant.

## Example of Gradual Return-to-Work Plan

The following is an example of what a gradual return-to-work plan may be structured as. It is important to note that the following example is not a strict format which the Committee is required to follow, but an example for the understanding of registrants and the public. It is at the sole discretion of the Committee to customize the conditions, restrictions, and parameters of a customized gradual return to practice to ensure the interest and safety of the public is upheld.

	0 – 6 Months	6 – 12 Months	1 – 2 Years	3 – 5 Years	5+ Years
<b>Practice Hours</b>	Refrain from practice	24 hrs/week max. 8 hr shifts	32 hrs/week max. 8 hr shifts	Full time hrs not overnight max. 8 hr shifts	Licence conditions may remain in effect if a relapse occurred during the program Annual meeting or discussion with the College to ensure adequate supports remain in place
<b>Mental Health and/or Addiction Specialist</b>	Weekly appointments with initial diagnosis and treatment plan	Bi-weekly appointments with follow-up reports	Monthly appointments with follow-up reports	Quarterly appointments with follow-up reporting	Quarterly appointments with follow-up reporting
<b>Family Physician</b>	Weekly appointments with initial diagnosis and treatment plan	Bi-weekly appointments with follow-up reports	Monthly appointments with follow-up reports	Quarterly appointments with follow-up reporting	Quarterly appointments with follow-up reporting
<b>Group Support</b>	3-7 times/week	1-3 times/week	Weekly	Weekly - Bi-weekly	Case dependent

## Successful Completion of the Monitoring Program

A registrant has successfully completed a monitoring program if:



- The registrant has adhered to and participated in the monitoring program for the set amount of time
- Treatment or therapy is deemed completed in an expert's opinion
- The registrant continues to maintain negative drug and/or alcohol screening results
- The registrant has practiced pharmacy safely for the minimum length of time established, abiding with any practice restrictions
- The registrant has attended treatment and support meetings as required
- The registrant has completed and demonstrates self-reflection
- The required reports from their supervisor, medical and/or other supports, have been received within the provided time frame and do not identify areas of concern, and support continued practice
- Any other aspects stipulated in the undertaking have been fulfilled

## Termination of a Monitoring Program

There are circumstances that show a registrant is not ready to engage or continue with a monitoring program and should not be permitted to practice:

- The registrant fails to provide monitoring documentation or notifications
- The registrant resents a danger to themselves and/or their patients
- The registrant refuses to stop practicing when required to
- The registrant fails to undergo drug and/or alcohol screening requirements
- The registrant does not follow treatment recommendations
- The monitors must take into account the extent to which the situation presents a threat to public safety, the seriousness of the violation, and any factors that aggravate or mitigate the situation.

## Conclusion

The intent of a gradual return to practice is both to support the registrant in successful recovery from the circumstances and/or disease state which resulted in requiring a gradual return to practice, and ensure that at all times the public interest and safety is maintained.

Situations of a gradual return to practice are always complex and the Complaints Committee is respectful of the great responsibility of directing a monitoring program. This is not a short-term goal and thus, time and dedication from both the registrant and the Complaints Committee must be invested by setting incremental achievable goals over the course of monitoring program. Great effort is taken to ensure that the mandate of the College is upheld, and registrants are able to progress through a gradual return to practice being respected as people, to achieve excellent pharmacy practice for the well-being of their patients.