

Full Record Display

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The self-regulating body for Alberta's 5,700 physicians wants to change the way some MDs handle patients involved in insurance cases.

Recommendations from senior staff of the Alberta College of Physicians and Surgeons could come as early as this fall, said registrar Dr. Larry Ohlhauser.

The staff are conducting an internal review of literature on the subject of "**independent medical examination**," or IME, work.

Ohlhauser said the college launched the review last year after patients complained about insurance companies' cancelling their benefits after receiving questionable reports from doctors paid by the insurers.

Dr. Arnold Voth, of Edmonton, a specialist in internal medicine who sounded an alarm on shady IME activity in a letter published in the January-February issue of Alberta Doctors Digest, said he wrote the letter "because I knew some of my patients were having a problem."

Ohlhauser said he and his fellow administrators decided to take action because "we felt it was important to review and decide whether there should be an educational program put in place for physicians."

IMEs are performed to document the nature of a **medical** problem, how long it is likely to last and how likely a claim is without merit.

"The physician is required to bring the same skill and judgment to the interaction as they would if they were treating a patient," Ohlhauser said.

Ohlhauser's announcement follows a May 1-2 Calgary Herald series of articles about complaints over the way the Workers' Compensation Board handles claims, and about how WCB and some life insurance companies use doctors to discredit claimants.

Aloma Mitchell of Calgary, president and founder of Fibromyalgia -- First Step and Beyond Society of Canada, welcomed the move.

"There's a lot of people that are not having a proper physical done on them."

Manuel Januario of Edmonton, past-president of Provincial Injured Workers Coalition Society, said the college gives physicians little incentive to obey its edicts.

"If they were to do something with a panel that would involve the public, the feedback would be a lot more impressive."

Wendy Koenig, of Edmonton, president of the ME Society of Canada, an association of chronic fatigue syndrome patients, said Ohlhauser began promising the review and guidelines in 1997.

"I'm not holding my breath," she said.

Koenig added, however, that the publicity may speed things up.

- The Issue: Workers' compensation claims.

- What's New: College of Physicians and Surgeons wants to change the way doctors handle insurance examinations.

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