

## The Presence of a Third Party During Breast and Pelvic Examinations

This Policy Statement has been prepared by the Social Sexual Issues Committee, reviewed by the Family Physicians Advisory Committee and the Clinical Practice Gynaecology Committee and has been approved by the Executive and Council of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada.

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The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada emphasizes that a complete medical examination should include a breast and pelvic physical examination. The following recommendations are made to physicians regarding clinical examination in the office and hospital settings:

1. It is a reasonable and acceptable practice to perform a physical examination, including breast and pelvic examination, without the presence of a third person in the room unless the woman or health care provider indicates a desire for a third party to be present.

**Key Words:** Breast examination, pelvic examination, third party, chaperone

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2. When a third party is present, it is recommended that the name of the person and his or her relationship to the patient and/or health care provider be documented in the patient's medical record.
3. If the health care provider chooses to have a third person present during all examinations, the health care provider should explain this policy to the woman.
4. If the woman wants a third party to be in the room, her wishes should be respected. She may choose the person she wants to be in the room.
5. Discussion about the presence of a third person in an examination room should stress that both the woman and the health care provider can choose to have a third person present during the examination. A woman should be offered that choice by one or more of the following means:
  - the health care provider may display a sign within the office that explains the choice,
  - the woman may be verbally offered the presence of a third person in the examination room,
  - the staff may document, within the office chart, the woman's choice with respect to third-party presence, so that the health care provider is made aware of the woman's choice before seeing her.
6. In the absence of a private area where the woman may disrobe (e.g., a curtained area or a separate office), the health care provider should leave the room before the woman undresses. Proper gowns or drapes should be available for the woman undergoing a pelvic and breast examination.
7. The health care provider should respect the wishes of the woman regarding privacy during history-taking and physical examination. Many women may not wish to have a third person in the examination room, so that they can discuss personal or intimate matters with the health care provider alone. Health care providers should be sensitive to this wish, and respect it as much as possible. However, the health care provider should use caution at all times to avert any potentially compromising situation.
8. If the situation is deemed to be too sensitive for breast and pelvic examinations to be conducted without the presence of a third party and a third party is not available or is refused by the patient, the health care provider should decline to conduct the examination.
9. If the health care provider or the woman wishes to have a third party present, the health care facility must comply with this request and provide an individual that is acceptable to both the patient and the health care provider.

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