

THE PRESENCE OF A THIRD PARTY DURING BREAST AND PELVIC EXAMINATIONS

This Policy Statement was revised by the Social Sexual Issues Committee, reviewed by the Executive Committee, and approved by the Council of The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada (SOGC).

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

1. It is a reasonable and acceptable practice to perform a 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.
2. 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.
3. If the woman desires a third party to be in the room, her wishes should be respected. She may select the person of her choice.
4. Discussion about the presence of a third person in an examination room should stress both the woman's and the health-care provider's choices. That choice should be offered to the woman by one of the following means:
 - the health-care provider may display a sign explaining the choice within the office,
 - the woman may be verbally offered the presence of a third person in the examination room, or
 - the staff may document within the office chart the woman's choice with respect to third-party presence, such that the health-care provider is made aware of the woman's choice prior to seeing her.
5. In the absence of an examination room separate from the health-care provider's 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. If the examination area is within the health-care provider's office, a curtained area should be available where the woman can dress and undress in privacy within that office space.
6. 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 avoid any potentially compromising situation.
7. If the health-care provider or the woman wishes to have a third party present, the health-care facility must provide it.

This policy statement replaces Policy Statement No. 20 dated April 1993.

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Key Words

Breast examination, pelvic examination, third party