



What you must know about ... preventing sexual abuse

The College of Medical Radiation and Imaging Technologists of Ontario (CMRITO) is responsible for responding to complaints and reports of sexual abuse by medical radiation and imaging technologists (MRITs). We investigate every allegation of sexual abuse in accordance with the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* (RHPA), and are committed to supporting patients through this process.

Sexual abuse is never acceptable and will not be tolerated.

What is sexual abuse?

Sexual abuse is broadly defined in the RHPA and includes sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual relations, touching of a sexual nature, and behaviour or remarks of a sexual nature.

Sexual abuse of a patient occurs when an MRIT:

- has physical sexual relations with a patient
- touches a patient in a sexual manner (for example, touching a patient's genitals when it is not required as part of a procedure)
- behaves in a sexual manner towards a patient (for example, touching a patient's shoulder or hand unnecessarily and in a manner that implies a sexual interest in the patient)
- makes remarks of a sexual nature to a patient (for example, commenting on the appearance of a patient's breasts or genitals)

Any touching, behaviour, and/or remarks of a sexual nature are considered sexual abuse.

Contact and comments that are of a clinical nature and are appropriate to the care provided are not considered sexual abuse.

The mandatory penalties for sexual abuse include suspension and/or revocation of a registrant's registration.

Zero tolerance

CMRITO has a zero tolerance policy for the sexual abuse of patients.

Medical radiation and imaging technology requires physical contact with patients when performing diagnostic procedures and delivering therapeutic treatments. MRITs should use professional and supportive behaviours in delivering these services and ensure that all physical contact is clinically appropriate and acceptable to the patient.

Zero tolerance means that:

- acts of sexual abuse are never acceptable and will not be tolerated
- any allegation of sexual abuse of patients will be investigated by CMRITO
- CMRITO recognizes the extent of injury that sexual abuse causes both the patient and others related to the patient
- MRITs deliver services to a wide range of individuals from different cultural backgrounds with a variety of viewpoints and perspectives, and must therefore accept that there may be broad definitions of what is considered sexual abuse and appreciate that what constitutes “sexual nature” may depend on the patient’s experience
- MRITs must be sensitive to the needs of their patients and, if a patient is uncomfortable with the words or behaviour being used by an MRIT, change their words or behaviour

CMRITO provides funding for therapy and counselling for patients who allege that they have been sexually abused by a registrant, as outlined in the RHPA.

Principles of communication and touching

MRITs must communicate effectively and pay careful attention to the way they share information and the words they use when speaking with patients. They must also be active and compassionate listeners, observe body language, and be sensitive to their patient’s concerns and needs. Awareness of cultural differences and physical barriers which may interfere with clear communication – and respect for these differences – will help MRITs practise the profession in a responsive and responsible manner.

CMRITO is committed to providing MRITs with information and resources to help them perform their duties responsibly and in a manner that reflects the profession’s commitment to respecting the personal dignity of every individual who entrusts themselves to their care. CMRITO’s [What you must know about ... communicating with patients](#) provides helpful guidelines for effective communication.

MRITs must:

- communicate effectively and pay attention to the ways in which information is conveyed and the words they select when speaking with patients
- be active and compassionate listeners that are sensitive to their patient’s concerns and needs
- be aware of and respect cultural and physical barriers which may interfere with clear communication

Following the principles outlined below will help MRITs achieve the high standards of integrity and effectiveness that should be part of their care for their patients.

Principles of communication and touching

Talk before touching	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• explain to the patient why, when, and where you might touch them• ensure that the patient has provided consent before starting the procedure• only touch the patient where needed to conduct the procedure• respect the patient’s personal space• respect the patient’s right to change their mind, pause, or end the procedure at any time
Treat every patient with respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• greet the patient and anyone accompanying them in a welcoming manner and with a positive attitude• introduce yourself to the patient, tell them your profession, and what procedure you are going to perform• show a respectful and caring attitude towards the patient by listening to and respecting their perspectives and choices• respect the dignity, privacy, and autonomy of the patient• provide individualized, comprehensive, and safe treatment during examinations or therapy sessions, considering the patient’s particular physical and emotional needs, values, and cultural background

<p>Reserve judgement and never make assumptions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ask your patient how they wish to be addressed • clarify the role of anyone accompanying the patient • do not make assumptions or judge people, their families, or their abilities • be aware of your own body language, tone of voice, and non-verbal behaviour • actively listen to the patient to be aware of their concerns and anxieties, and respond appropriately throughout the procedure
<p>Speak directly to the patient</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain eye contact when speaking to the patient • provide clear and understandable information to the patient or patient's substitute decision maker prior to, during, and after the procedure, using an interpreter if necessary
<p>Maintain confidentiality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preserve and protect the patient's information and confidentiality
<p>Create a safe environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain clear and appropriate professional boundaries in the MRIT-patient relationship • avoid placing patients at unnecessary risk of harm, pain, or distress • treat all patients equitably, regardless of race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, marital status, family status, disability, or type of illness

Mandatory reporting of sexual abuse

Under the RHPA, health professionals must file a written report if they have reasonable grounds obtained through the course of their practice to believe that a patient has been sexually abused by an MRIT or a registrant of any other regulated health College.

Failure to report sexual abuse of patients when there are reasonable grounds to believe the abuse has occurred is an offence under the RHPA and can lead to severe penalties on conviction including a fine of not more than \$50,000.

Specifically, if an MRIT believes a patient has been sexually abused, they must:

- submit a written report to the Registrar of the College that regulates the profession of the person being reported within 30 days or, if there is reason to believe that the abuse will continue or that others will be abused, the report must be submitted immediately

Additional information about mandatory reporting under the RHPA:

- MRITs are required to report information obtained in the course of practising the profession
- MRITs must only submit a report if the name of the practitioner involved in the alleged abuse is known
- the patient's name must not be included in the report without their written consent
- the Act provides protection to a person who files a report of sexual abuse in good faith

Conclusion

Sexual abuse by health professionals is never acceptable. CMRITO will investigate all complaints and reports of sexual abuse by MRITs against patients in accordance with the RHPA. Any CMRITO registrant found guilty of sexual abuse will face significant consequences, up to and including suspension, loss of registration, and possible criminal prosecution through the legal system. CMRITO is committed to ensuring patient safety and supporting patients through the investigation process.

For more information about preventing sexual abuse, please contact the CMRITO Professional Conduct team at professionalconduct@cmrito.org.

