



# *Saskatchewan College of Psychologists*

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## **Membership Advisory**

### **Authorized Practice Endorsement (APE)**

Recent failures of the APE portion of the oral examination have highlighted for Council concerns regarding the APE evaluation process in general. The need to clarify for the membership the meaning and acquisition of APE designation has evolved. The goal of this service advisory is to provide some clarity about these issues.

#### ***Background***

Under the *Psychologists Act 1997, Section 23* the communication (understood by SCP Council as referring primarily to written communication) of a diagnosis is a protected practice. Full Practice members wishing to convey diagnoses in their practice must apply to the Saskatchewan College of Psychologists (SCP) for APE, and be declared as competent to diagnose in order to be awarded the APE designation. The only other professional body in the province that is allowed to convey a diagnosis is the medical profession. Delegation of the privilege to diagnose is non-permissible under the Act.

As psychologists we understand that diagnoses can, and usually do, have major consequences and implications for the individual being given diagnoses. The implications can be far reaching and life long, and may impact the individual's sense of self, his/her family, his/her interpersonal relationships, and his/her employment, education and opportunities. As a regulatory body whose primary responsibility is the protection of the public, the College takes very seriously the issue of competence of diagnostics and its impact on the lives of individuals and families. As a profession we are bound by our Code of Ethics (*CPA*) to practice only in those areas in which we are competent, and we are compelled to *Respect the Dignity of Persons* (Principle 1) above all else. The College takes these responsibilities very seriously, and thus has been rigorous in its requirements for members wishing to diagnose in their practices.

In June 2001 the Canadian regulatory bodies in psychology across the country signed the *Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA)*. Through this agreement Canadian Psychology regulators seek to ensure a national standard of training, licensure and practice in psychology, and to allow for the increased mobility of psychologists between jurisdictions. The requirements for APE in Saskatchewan are consistent with, and are assumed under the MRA.

The ability to competently diagnose is viewed by the SCP as a broad function that is not limited to a specific classification system (e.g. DSM IV-TR, ICD 10), a specific set of disorders, or a specific client population. Psychologists agree that diagnostics involve more than simply a "cookbook" approach to classification. An individual competent in diagnostics not only has a

thorough understanding of particular classification systems, but also psychopathology, psychological assessment, personality and individual differences, and psycho diagnostics. Therefore, individuals who are granted the APE by the College are viewed as competent to diagnose in general, using various diagnostic systems and with various disorders and populations. Further, these individuals are judged to have competency and understanding in the areas of diagnostics and psychopathology. While there are no limitations placed on the scope of mental disorders diagnoses that an individual with the APE can give, the expectation of the College is that qualified members will use the *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists (CPA)* in guiding their practice and thus will avoid practicing in areas where they are not completely competent.

With few exceptions (MRA compliant applicants from other jurisdictions and “grandparented” members of Saskatchewan College of Psychologists) **all members of SCP are now required to sit an oral examination** in order to be awarded the APE designation (see *Saskatchewan College of Psychologists Policy – APE*). Application forms for the APE are available on the College’s website ([www.skcp.ca](http://www.skcp.ca)). In applying for APE, applicants must be recommended by a Full Practice member of the College who has the APE designation and the declared areas of practice competence that are consistent with those of the applicant. The endorsing psychologist is responsible for the diagnostic competence of the member being endorsed. Inadequate diagnostic performance by the applicant may create liability for the endorsing member. The required application forms/documentation for APE differs slightly, depending on whether the applicant is a Full Practice member, a Full Practice member from another jurisdiction, or a Restricted Practice member. The composition of the oral examination panel will also differ slightly depending on the member’s status.

Applicants are required to pay a \$100.00 application fee and to submit this with all required documentation before an oral examination will be considered. In preparation for the oral examination the applicant must submit two work samples (identifying information removed) and a CV. An oral examination can be up to 90 minutes in duration. *The College reserves the right to impose additional requirements for education, and/or supervision, and/or an oral examination in cases where there are concerns or unclear qualifications. This may include both MRA compliant candidates from other jurisdictions or “grandparented” members of the College.*

### *Characteristics of Oral Examinations for APE*

Questions asked during an oral examination may relate to general questions relating to topics such as multi-axial diagnoses, diagnostic process, differential diagnosis, and psychological assessment or to specific diagnostic criteria from the DSM IV or ICD 10. Candidates are directed to the *SCP Policy on APE* as well as the *Psychologists Act 1997, Bylaw 43* for more detail on the required knowledge, skills and abilities for APE designation. The focus of the designation and the consequent examination is not narrow, rather it is broad. Assessment for APE relates to the assessment of “broad capacity.” Concerns have been raised as to the fairness of assessing broad capacity. However, as the College cannot predetermine the extent of one’s ability to diagnose, nor can it restrict a candidate’s job mobility, the College has to ensure that a psychologist with this designation is competent to diagnose beyond the population served, the type of diagnostic problem, or the job description at the time of examination.

### ***Failure of an APE Examination***

In the event that an applicant is unsuccessful in obtaining the APE designation he/she will be given two additional chances to re-take the examination. The first can occur no sooner than 6 months following the original examination, and if the second is necessary it must be requested within two years of the original examination. In between re-examinations, the candidate is required to document for the Registration Committee and Oral Examination Committee the sources and type of additional knowledge and training that they have acquired since the last examination. In all re-examinations, an assessor/supervisor will have to recommend the candidate for re-examination, and attest to the candidate's sufficient knowledge and capacity.

Prior to successfully achieving the APE designation, the candidate will continue to require a qualified co-signer for any diagnoses, and in the case of a Restricted Practice member will also continue to require direct supervision of their practice as outlined by the College. If a candidate fails both re-examinations they will have to wait an additional three years before they reapply for APE. At that time they will be viewed by the College as a new applicant. Failure of the APE portion of the examination, but passing the remainder of the examination may still entitle a candidate to receive a ***Full Practice License***, without the APE endorsement. If a candidate is already a Full Practice member of the SCP, their status will not be affected by a failure of the APE.

Under ***Section 22 of the Psychologists Act 1997*** a candidate who is unsuccessful in obtaining the APE designation can formally appeal to Council the outcome of the examination. The exact procedure for an appeal is outlined in the ***Act*** as well as the ***SCP Policies: Oral Examination Incomplete Passes and Failures*** and ***APE***. ***As a matter of Council policy, only one appeal will be heard on the same matter from a member or applicant.***