

Regulatory body disciplinary action: What do pharmacists, dentists, and nurse practitioners get in trouble for?

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**Background:** In Canada, health professional regulatory bodies investigate and discipline professionals in cases of professional misconduct or clinical incompetence.

**Purpose:** The objective of this study is to determine the causes and consequences of disciplinary action for pharmacists, dentists, and nurse practitioners in Canada by identifying the reasons for discipline and penalties applied, and identifying differences in discipline across professions, provinces, and demographics.

**Methods:** Regulatory body disciplinary action cases for pharmacists, dentists, and nurse practitioners from 10 Canadian provinces were obtained. Cases were either publicly available online or were obtained through the regulator by request. Demographic information was obtained from the disciplinary case or from the online register of professionals. Cases were coded to identify the reason for disciplinary action, penalties applied, and demographic factors.

**Results:** There were 1025 cases from 10 provinces that occurred between January 2010 – December 2020. Specifically, there were 665 pharmacist cases, 344 dentist cases, and 16 nurse practitioner cases. Rates of disciplinary action were low. Across professions, professional misconduct and clinical competence were more common than dishonest business practices. Males were more likely than females to be disciplined. In the cases where place of practice/specialty was reported, 98% of pharmacist cases involved pharmacists, and 84% of dentist cases involved general dentists.

**Conclusion:** This study was the first in Canada to characterize disciplinary action outcomes for dentists and nurse practitioners, and updates previous work on pharmacists. A main finding of this study was the lack of transparency in the reporting of disciplinary action cases and in the information available on each regulator's online register. This study highlighted differences in disciplinary outcomes across professions and across provinces. More research is needed to evaluate current disciplinary processes. Future studies could focus on a professional's motives or psychosocial factors that might influence why a professional might be subject to discipline.