



College of Respiratory
Therapists of Ontario

Ordre des thérapeutes
respiratoires de l'Ontario

ELECTRONIC SIGNATURES

Practice FAQs

March 2017

QUESTION

Can I accept an order that a physician has authorized using an electronic signature?

ANSWER

In situations where a physician's signature is required (e.g., prescriptions, requisition forms), an electronic signature is generally treated by the legislation and the relevant regulatory bodies as equivalent to a handwritten signature.

The [Hospital Management](#) regulation (O.Reg. 965), which was created under the [Public Hospitals Act](#), states that every order for a treatment or diagnostic procedure must be "authenticated" by the physician (or other authorizing healthcare professional). Authenticate is defined as meaning "*to identify oneself as the author of a document or a record by personal signature*".

The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) [Prescribing Drugs Policy](#) states that a physician can authorize a **prescription** verbally, with a written signature, or electronically – provided it meets the College of Pharmacists (OCP) [Authenticity of Prescriptions using Unique Identifiers for Prescribers](#) position statement. Other types of physician's orders (e.g., requisition forms) can also be authorized verbally, with a written signature, or electronically.

The [Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act](#) (PIPEDA) defines an electronic signature as one that "*consists of one or more letters, characters, numbers or other symbols in digital form incorporated in, attached to or associated with an electronic document*". The Act goes on to outline the requirements for ensuring that electronic signatures are secure (s.43).