

The Connecticut General Assembly



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Rep. Turco Calls to Prohibit Unauthorized Pelvic Exams of Sedated Patients

HARTFORD — **State Representative Gary Turco** (D – Newington) joined 19 democratic lawmakers Monday, March 9 to submit [testimony](#) to the legislature's Public Health Committee to support legislation prohibiting unauthorized pelvic exams of female patients under deep sedation, anesthesia or unconscious.

"The disgraceful practice of performing nonessential and nonconsensual pelvic exams on sedated, or otherwise unconscious female patients has recently been brought to light, and indicates a complete disregard for women's bodily autonomy," said **Rep. Turco**. "Informed consent should be more than a signature on a form; it needs to be part of the medical decision-making process. Patient decisions must be respected, and both medical educators and students have the ethical and moral obligation to uphold those choices."

The [bill](#) would require licensed physicians and medical school students to obtain a patient's consent prior to conducting a pelvic examination when the patient is deeply sedated, anesthetized, or unconscious. It also stipulates the exam must fall within the scope of the surgical procedure or diagnostic purposes. Violations of the law would permit the state Department of Public Health to take disciplinary action.

Despite being a frequent practice during medical school, the practice raises certain ethical dilemmas for students as well as educators and could erode student attitudes about the importance of obtaining patient consent.

In 2019, [Elle magazine](#) evaluated 101 medical students from seven predominant U.S. medical schools and found that 61 percent of students performed the a pelvic exam on a sedated female patient without obtaining the patient's consent, and 47 percent of those students were uncomfortable with how the institutions addressed those exams.

A [2003 study](#) published in the American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology surveyed 401 students from five different Philadelphia medical schools on their attitudes concerning obtaining informed consent from a patient prior to performing a pelvic exam while she was temporarily incapacitated. The study found that students who performed the exams without consent were less likely to value seeking patient consent in the future.

The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists affirms that the [pelvic exam is a fundamental component to women's health care](#) and is essential in screening for "treatable gynecologic conditions" and establishes an open dialogue between the patient and their care provider. The College also states practitioners have a [professional responsibility](#) to prioritize patient wellbeing and their right to make informed decisions over learning new skills and techniques, and educational institutions must create a work environment that enhances professional competence.

The College contends "...any pelvic examination planned for an anesthetized woman offers her no personal benefit and is performed solely for teaching purposes, it should be performed only with her specific informed consent and obtained before her surgery."

The failure to obtain patient consent could also erode trust patients have in their physicians, as well as "[the foundation of medical practice](#)" as a whole.

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