

SUBJECT: USE OF THE TERM “DOCTOR” **AS IT RELATES TO PHYSICIANS**

SUBMITTED BY: Bureau of State Government Affairs

REFERRED TO: Ad Hoc Committee

1 WHEREAS, the American Osteopathic Association recognizes nurse practitioners,
2 physician assistants, certified nurse midwives, certified registered nurse anesthetists,
3 chiropractors, naturopaths, acupuncturists, homeopaths, optometrists, podiatrists,
4 psychologists, pharmacists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and
5 numerous other non-physician clinicians have unique and valid roles in providing
6 healthcare; and

7 WHEREAS, an August 2008 study by the Global Strategy Group provided data ~~showed~~
8 **SHOWING** when surveyed, 38% of people heard the title, “Doctor of Nursing
9 Practice,” and assumed this person went to medical school and that while 96% felt
10 that “all health care professionals, including licensed medical doctors and non-
11 medical doctors, should be required to clearly state their level of training and
12 licensing in all advertising and marketing materials,” most (51%), said they could not
13 “identify who is a licensed medical doctor and who is not by reading what services
14 they offer, their title, and other licensing credentials in advertising or other marketing
15 materials.” In other words, patients want to be informed of the level of training of
16 their medical providers, but do not necessarily understand it when they are advised
17 of it; and

18 WHEREAS, Medicare “defines “Physician” as “Physicians are one type of healthcare
19 professional that cares for patients.” In addition, Medicare defines “Other Healthcare
20 Professional” as “Other types of health professionals, who are not physicians, include
21 nurse practitioners, physician assistants, social workers, psychologists, and physical
22 therapists” (Medicare policies at <http://www.medicare.gov>); and

23 WHEREAS, the practice of osteopathic medicine is the responsibility of properly licensed
24 osteopathic physicians; and

25 WHEREAS, the AOA strongly opposes attempts by non-physician clinicians (NPCs) to pass
26 legislation making NPCs equivalent to physicians; and

27 WHEREAS, the roles for all members of the medical team need to be clearly defined and
28 understood, through established protocols or written agreements; and

29 WHEREAS, physicians are licensed and regulated by state licensing boards; now, therefore
30 be it

1 RESOLVED, that the AOA hereby adopts a policy that AOA members are encouraged to
2 use ~~only~~ the terms “physician” **OR DOCTOR** to describe themselves, leaving other
3 terms such as “practitioner,” “clinician,” or “provider” to be used by ~~non-clinician~~
4 **NON-PHYSICIAN** clinicians; and, be it further

5 RESOLVED, that the AOA supports **THE APPROPRIATE USE OF** ~~using~~ credentials
6 and professional degrees in advertisements; and be it further

7 RESOLVED, that the AOA ~~will~~ provide a mechanism for physicians to report
8 advertisements related to medical care that are false or deceptive; and, be it further

9 **RESOLVED, that THE AOA OPPOSE a non-physician clinicianS USE OF THE**
10 **TITLE ~~should not advertise himself/herself as a physician or doctor~~ IF**
11 **BECAUSE SUCH COMMUNICATION IS LIKELY TO DECEIVE THE**
12 **PUBLIC BY IMPLYING THAT THE NON-PHYSICIAN CLINICIAN IS**
13 **ENGAGED IN THE UNLIMITED PRACTICE OF MEDICINE; and, be it**
14 **further**

15 RESOLVED, that the AOA ~~will~~ oppose ~~state~~ legislation that would expand the use of the
16 term “physician” to persons other than **US-TRAINED DOs**, and MDs; and, be it
17 further

18 RESOLVED, that the AOA supports a policy that physicians and non-physician clinicians
19 identify themselves to their patients noting their degree in both a verbal description
20 as well as a visual identification by use of a nametag; and, be it further

21 RESOLVED, that the AOA will oppose any legislation, which would allow non-physician
22 clinicians to be called “~~doctor~~” or “physician;” **AND, BE IT FURTHER**

23 **RESOLVED, THAT THE ~~AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION~~ AOA**
24 **SUPPORTS A POLICY RESERVING THE TITLE “PHYSICIAN” FOR**
25 **US-TRAINED DOs, AND MDs ~~DOs/MDs~~ WHO HAVE ESTABLISHED**
26 **THE INTEGRITY OF THEIR EDUCATION, TRAINING,**
27 **EXAMINATION AND REGULATION FOR THE UNLIMITED**
28 **PRACTICE OF MEDICINE; AND BE IT FURTHER**

29 **RESOLVED, THAT THE AOA OPPOSES THE MISUSE OF THE TITLE**
30 **“DOCTOR” BY NON-PHYSICIAN CLINICIANS, IN ALL**
31 **COMMUNICATIONS AND CLINICAL SETTINGS BECAUSE SUCH**
32 **USE DECEIVES THE PUBLIC BY IMPLYING THE NON-PHYSICIAN**
33 **CLINICIAN’S EDUCATION, TRAINING OR CREDENTIALING IS**
34 **EQUIVALENT TO A DO OR MD.**

Explanatory Statement: ~~The American Osteopathic Association supports a policy that as DOs/MDs have proven and continue to prove the efficacy of their education, training, examinations, and regulation for the unlimited practice of medicine, it is the AOA’s firm conviction that only holders of DO and MD degrees be licensed for medicine’s unlimited practice and called “physician.” AOA members are encouraged to use only the terms “physician” or “doctor” to describe himself or herself. Advertisements should include~~

~~degrees and credentials and should be monitored for accuracy. The AOA will oppose state legislation that would expand the use of the term “doctor” or “physician” to persons outside of DOs and MD. The AOA supports a policy that physicians and non-physicians identify themselves to their patients noting their degree in both a verbal description as well as a visual identification by use of a nametag and the AOA will oppose any legislation, which would allow non-physician clinicians to be called “doctor” or “physician.”~~

ACTION TAKEN **APPROVED AS AMENDED**

DATE **7/17/09**