



Florida Society of Ophthalmology

Position Statement Restricting the Use of the Term “Physician” to Medical Doctors and Doctors of Osteopathy

§ 458.305(4), Fla. Stat. 2010

“‘Physician’ means a person who is licensed to practice medicine in this state.”

§ 459.003(4), Fla. Stat. 2010

“Osteopathic Physician” means a person who is licensed to practice osteopathic medicine in this state.”

FSO Position

The FSO seeks legislation prohibiting the use of the term “physician” by any person other than a Medical Doctor (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathy (DO). As a matter of public safety and truthful advertising, allowing healthcare professionals who have not attained MD or DO status to present themselves as “physicians” is deceptive, misleading, and dangerous to the public. It also creates patient confusion and inefficiencies in care which unnecessarily drives up the cost of medical care.

Discussion

The general public expects that a “physician” refers to a care provider who has successfully finished medical school or osteopathy school. MDs and DOs possess far greater academic and clinical experience than other healthcare providers without similar credentials. Allowing non-MDs and non-DOs to hold themselves to the public as “physicians” confuses patients and leads patients to seek treatment from providers that are not qualified. This exposes patients to unnecessary risks and often requires follow-up care from qualified MDs and DOs which increases health care costs.

The confusing misuse of the term "physician" is particularly acute in the eye care area where optometrists increasingly refer to themselves as "optometric physicians". A comparison of ophthalmology to optometry highlights the importance of prohibiting the use of the term “physician” to MDs and DOs. Optometric training typically consists of four years of optometry school following graduation from college. In contrast, ophthalmologists spend four years in medical school (after graduation from college), followed by one year of internship (usually in internal medicine or general surgery), followed by three years of ophthalmology residency training, frequently followed by one or more years of post-graduate fellowship training.

As a result of their advanced education, ophthalmologists practicing in Florida may perform surgery,¹ treat systemic diseases, and prescribe oral medication.²

Conclusion

In order to ensure the safety of patients, avoid patient confusion, and control healthcare costs, the term “physician” should be reserved for medical professionals who have earned their MD or DO degree and are properly licensed in Florida.

¹ See § 463.014(4), Fla. Stat. (2010) (prohibiting optometrists from performing surgery of any kind).

² See § 463.014(3), Fla. Stat. (2010) (prohibiting optometrists from “prescribing, ordering, dispensing, administering, supplying, selling or giving any systemic drugs.”).