



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
PLASTIC SURGEONS®



THE PLASTIC SURGERY
FOUNDATION™

444 East Algonquin Road • Arlington Heights, IL 60005-4664
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ASPS ISSUE BRIEF

Truth-in-Advertising

Background

Oftentimes, patients are confused about the differences between various types of health care providers. Patients can suffer from “white coat confusion” when they mistakenly believe that they are meeting with a physician (MD or DO) when they are actually meeting with a lower level provider. Further, it is well known that the public considers board certification to have significant meaning and importance; however, it may be widely and inconsistently used. Simply stating that one is “board certified” without disclosing the certifying body or even the specialty that the physician is certified in is not specific enough for a patient to understand the type of training his or her physician has.

Since 2008, the American Medical Association has been surveying adults in order to develop an understanding of how the public perceived various levels of health care providers. Their results show that 94% of respondents believe that only a medical doctor or doctor of osteopathic medicine should be able to use the title “physician.” Many times, however, respondents were confused as to whether or not a specific health care provider was indeed a medical doctor. For example, 74% of respondents believed that podiatrists are medical doctors, they are not.

Clarity and transparency in health care advertising is paramount to protecting patient safety. Patients deserve to know precisely what type of health care professional is providing their treatment - whether it is a physician, nurse, assistant or technician. Uninformed choices could unfortunately lead to unintended consequences that could have been avoided.

The Solution

This confusion undermines the reliability of the health care system and puts patients at risk. Lawmakers must rectify this problem by introducing language that requires medical professionals to clearly and honestly disclose their levels of training and legal licensure without any misleading information in all of their advertising and marketing materials. Both physicians and non-physicians should be required to accurately and clearly disclose their training and qualifications to patients.

Additionally, in garnering the public’s trust in medical advertising in particular, patients must be able to uniformly rely that physicians appropriately use the “board certified” designation. Requiring physicians to disclose the full name of the board from which they receive their certificate provides necessary transparency, enabling prospective patients to discern the credentials and training of the physicians from whom they will receive care.

The American Medical Association provides great resources including a model bill that was authored in part by ASPS. This bill, which is supported by multiple specialty societies and individual state medical societies, includes language that requires that health care advertising be free of any misleading information and also requires health care providers to properly disclose their licensure and certifications in their advertisements.



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