

What doctors wish patients knew about scope of practice with Scott Ferguson, MD

The AMA's What Doctors Wish Patients Knew™ series provides physicians with a platform to share what they want patients to understand about today's health care headlines.

Featured topic and speaker

AMA member Scott Ferguson, MD, discusses what patients need to know about scope of practice and how physicians are trained to lead the health care team. Learn more about scope of practice.

Speaker

- Scott Ferguson, MD, diagnostic radiologist and member of the AMA Board of Trustees

Transcript

Voice-over: We've enlisted AMA member Dr. Scott Ferguson to share valuable information and insights about why scope of practice matters to patients. It's crucial that health care professionals perform the activities they're licensed to practice. This is called scope of practice. And although each health professional has a role in caring for patients, the field of medicine demands the education and leadership of a fully trained physician. Here's what Dr. Ferguson wishes patients knew.

Physicians must lead the care teams. At the AMA, we believe in the physician-led team, the person with the highest skill level, the most education, the one that is most capable of taking care of that patient and ensuring quality and safety, should lead any health care team. Nurse practitioners, PAs are all valuable members of the physician-led team, but a physician should always be at the top of that team and leading them for the care of our patients.

Why transparency matters. One of my best friends is a college president. He has a PhD. He's a doctor. What gets confusing is when nurse practitioner then go and get what they call a doctor or nurse and they'll come in and it'll say, Dr. Smith, Dr. Jones, whatever. It confuses patients.

It's called "scope creep" for a reason. That's why the Truth in Advertising campaign is so important, it's to let them know, is this an MD, a nurse practitioner, or a PA? If it is DNP, doctor or nurse practitioner, they need to know that they're not seeing the physician that had the level of training that physicians have.

Each state has different scope of practice requirements. Different health care professionals come to the legislature and they say, we want to expand our scope of practice to include this. It's a creep to allow those health care professionals to be able to do more than what they were trained to do. And the legislature has the ability to grant that every year in every state legislature. The biggest battles are around the expansion of scope of practice.

Scope of practice is defined by a health care professional's education level. Scope of practice is determined by the state legislatures. It sets the parameters around which health care professionals provide care to patients. It can indicate the type of procedures that someone can do or perform and whether or not they have to work with a physician and say, who can do surgery, who can prescribe medicines, who can do physical exams, who can work without a physician by their side? That's why medical schools exist. That's why medical boards exist, is to ensure the training that a physician receives is standardized across the country. And that's something that's lacking in other health care professionals is that standardization to ensure that you are qualified to take care of patients, to qualify to do surgery, to put patients to sleep, to see a patient independently, to diagnose and treat.

Scope creep can affect safety and public health. Patients are looking for quality. They come to us and they're looking for care. Scope of practice expansion would indicate they may see someone with less or training less able to take care of their problems.

Voice-over: From high cholesterol to sleep apnea and long COVID, learn what doctors wish patients knew about today's health care headlines at [ama-assn.org/wish](https://www.ama-assn.org/wish).