

AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION HOUSE OF DELEGATES

Resolution: 245  
(A-22)

Introduced by: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island,  
Vermont

Subject: Definition and Encouragement of the Appropriate Use of the Word  
"Physician"

Referred to: Reference Committee B

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1 Whereas, American Medical Association policy H-405.951 defines a physician as having a  
2 Doctor of Medicine or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, advocates for the definition of physician  
3 to be as above, and encourages physicians to insist on being identified as such and to use such  
4 a term rather than provider;<sup>1</sup> and

5  
6 Whereas, The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) has a policy in its publications and  
7 conferences to cease using the term "provider" to describe board-certified pediatricians. The  
8 AAP also encourages fellows and the media to use the term "pediatrician," "doctor," or  
9 "physician," instead of "provider" when describing board-certified pediatricians;<sup>2</sup> and

10  
11 Whereas, The American Academy of Family Physicians has a position that the term "provider"  
12 implies uniformity of expertise and knowledge among health care professionals, and this  
13 terminology implies an interchangeability that is inappropriate and erroneous. The term  
14 "provider" is of bureaucratic origin and has no significance beyond regulators and insurers. The  
15 implication is that patients can expect to receive the same level of care from any "provider";<sup>3</sup>  
16 and

17  
18 Whereas, The term "provider" makes no reference to professional values, suggesting these  
19 values are not important. It has been noted that using the "provider" designation for health  
20 professionals' risks deprofessionalizing them. Physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, and  
21 physician assistants value their specific professional identities and are proud to be referred to as  
22 such and respected for the professional values they connote<sup>4</sup>; and

23  
24 Whereas, Under federal regulations, a "health care provider" is defined as a doctor of medicine  
25 or osteopathy, podiatrist, dentist, chiropractor, clinical psychologist, optometrist, nurse  
26 practitioner, nurse-midwife, or a clinical social worker... or a Christian Science practitioner;<sup>5</sup> and

27  
28 Whereas, Physician burnout is a well-acknowledged problem in medicine. Jordan Cohen, MD,  
29 in his farewell address as president of the Association of American Medical Colleges noted that:  
30 "One of the biggest contributors to burnout is the high level of stress inherent in our job,  
31 combined with the lack of control over many aspects of our work. Not being in control of how we  
32 are addressed is the most basic of all issues that is 'low hanging fruit' to fix."<sup>6</sup> therefore be it

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<sup>1</sup> Ref: <https://policysearch.ama-assn.org/policyfinder/search/Definition%20and%20Use%20of%20the%20Term%20Physician%20H-405.951/relevant/1/>

<sup>2</sup> American Academy of Pediatrics, 2019 Annual Leadership Forum, Resolution #53 Calling Pediatricians "Doctors" Instead of "Providers"

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/provider-term-position.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/fullarticle/2506307>

<sup>5</sup> <https://hr.berkeley.edu/node/3777>

<sup>6</sup> Jordan J. Cohen, MD. AAMC Presidential Farewell Address, July 2006.

- 1 RESOLVED, That our American Medical Association independently, or in coordination with any
- 2 other appropriate medical organizations that have similar policy regarding the use of the term
- 3 “physician,” develop and implement a sustained and wide-reaching public relations campaign to
- 4 utilize the term “physician” and discontinue use of the term “provider.” (Directive to Take Action)

Fiscal Note: Not yet determined

Received: 05/18/22

## RELEVANT AMA POLICY

### Definition and Use of the Term Physician H-405.951

Our AMA:

1. Affirms that the term physician be limited to those people who have a Doctor of Medicine, Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, or a recognized equivalent physician degree and who would be eligible for an Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) residency.
  2. Will, in conjunction with the Federation, aggressively advocate for the definition of physician to be limited as defined above:
    - a. In any federal or state law or regulation including the Social Security Act or any other law or regulation that defines physician;
    - b. To any federal and state legislature or agency including the Department of Health and Human Services, Federal Aviation Administration, the Department of Transportation, or any other federal or state agency that defines physician; and
    - c. To any accrediting body or deeming authority including the Joint Commission, Health Facilities Accreditation Program, or any other potential body or authority that defines physician.
  3. Urges all physicians to insist on being identified as a physician, to sign only those professional or medical documents identifying them as physicians, and to not let the term physician be used by any other organization or person involved in health care.
  4. Ensure that all references to physicians by government, payers, and other health care entities involving contracts, advertising, agreements, published descriptions, and other communications at all times distinguish between physician, as defined above, and non-physicians and to discontinue the use of the term provider.
  5. Policy requires any individual who has direct patient contact and presents to the patient as a doctor, and who is not a physician, as defined above, must specifically and simultaneously declare themselves a non-physician and define the nature of their doctorate degree.
  6. Will review and revise its own publications as necessary to conform with the House of Delegates’ policies on physician identification and physician reference and will refrain from any definition of physicians as providers that is not otherwise covered by existing Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) Editorial Governance Plan, which protects the editorial independence of JAMA.
  7. Actively supports the Scope of Practice Partnership in the Truth in Advertising campaign
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