

HEALTH PROVIDERS: TRUTH IN ADVERTISING

The Problem:

Patients are confused about the differences in various types of health care providers. Often, patients mistakenly believe they are seeing medical doctors when they are not. For example, in a recent survey many non-physicians were identified as “medical doctors” by a significant percentage of the respondents: podiatrists (67% believed they were medical doctors) psychologists (49%) chiropractors (38%) audiologists (33%).

Additionally, patients are not confident about the truth of health advertisements and confusing and misleading ads undermine the reliability of our healthcare system. A majority of surveyed respondents did not think it was “...easy to identify who is a licensed medical doctor and who is not by reading the services they offer...” and 48% were not “confident” that healthcare professionals advertise and provide services for which they are properly trained. 96% of survey respondents felt that “medical doctors and non-medical doctors, should be required to clearly state their level of training and licensing in all advertising and marketing materials.”

The Solution:

All healthcare professionals – physicians and non-physicians – should be required to accurately and clearly disclose their training and qualifications to patients. This can be easily accomplished by enacting legislation with two main provisions. First, the healthcare practitioner should wear a name tag during all patient encounters that clearly identifies the type of license held by that practitioner. Second, the healthcare practitioner must display in his or her office a writing that clearly identifies the type of license held by the healthcare practitioner.

The Objections:

Some non-physician healthcare providers may believe the use of the term “doctor” gives them a leg up in attracting patients. However, 91% of the survey respondents believe that only licensed medical doctors should be able to use the title “physician.” At the same time, the use of the term “doctor” may be appropriate if accurately disclosed (e.g. doctor of podiatric medicine, doctor of optometry, etc.)

What You Should Do:

Call/Write/Email members of Senate EHE Committee and House Health Government Operations Committee and ask them to sponsor and support Truth in Advertising legislation.

