

AMA Annual Meeting 2024: Strengthening Efforts Against Scope Creep



At the 2024 AMA Annual Meeting in Chicago, the House of Delegates (HOD) reinforced the American Medical Association's (AMA) long-standing commitment to combating scope creep and safeguarding patient safety. With a series of decisive actions, the AMA continues to challenge expansions in the scope of practice for nonphysician providers that threaten the quality of care.

Tackling Specialty Switching: Aligning NP and PA Training with Practice

One significant area of focus at the meeting was the phenomenon of speciality switching among nurse practitioners (NPs) and physician assistants (PAs). The latest federal data reveals that only 24% of NPs deliver primary care, highlighting a growing trend of nonphysician providers moving into various specialities. Despite the prevalence of this practice, there is a lack of publicly available data on the frequency and impact of such speciality switches.

Nurse practitioners and physician assistants often switch specialities during their careers, flexibility promoted by their professions. While state licensure requires that these providers graduate from accredited programs and obtain certification, these certifications are broad, allowing considerable freedom in practice settings. The AMA Board of Trustees report, adopted at the 2024 meeting, emphasised that this broad certification results in a misalignment between education and the speciality in which NPs and PAs practice. Many find themselves caring for patients outside their formal training and education.

Enhancing NP and PA Certifications to Counter Scope Misinformation

The HOD adopted new policies to address this issue, encouraging healthcare entities to ensure that NPs' certifications align with their specialities. Additionally, the AMA will continue educating policymakers about the nuances of NP and PA training and certification, advocating for a better alignment between training and practice.

Another critical action the delegates took focused on combating misinformation regarding the scope of practice expansions. Political misinformation about the benefits and safety of such expansions is a significant challenge, requiring substantial time and resources to counter. The AMA resolved to conduct comprehensive research on strategies to correct political misinformation and disinformation, with findings to be reported at the 2025 Annual Meeting. This initiative aims to bolster the AMA's advocacy efforts, ensuring that patient care remains under the supervision of the most highly trained professionals physicians.

Prioritising Patient Safety in Emergency Care and Addressing Dental Procedure Standards

Patient safety in emergency care was another focal point at the meeting. Research cited by the Florida Medical Association highlighted that unsupervised NPs in emergency settings increased lengths of stay and preventable hospitalisations. The AMA seeks federal legislation to prohibit staffing ratios that compromise proper physician supervision in emergency departments, advocating for 24/7 staffing by qualified physicians.

Furthermore, the delegates addressed the encroachment of dental professionals into medical procedures. The AMA adopted policies opposing regulatory efforts that allow dentists and dental hygienists to administer neurotoxins and dermal fillers, procedures that should be performed by trained medical professionals due to the high risks involved.

These actions at the 2024 AMA Annual Meeting build upon the AMA's successful track record in fighting scope creep. The AMA has helped stop over 100 legislative proposals in the past year alone. By continuously advocating for physician-led care and challenging inappropriate scope of practice expansions, the AMA remains committed to protecting patient safety and ensuring high-quality medical care.

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