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Unfavorable HB 428

The title of “physician” is bestowed upon those who have completed a standardized, 4-year medical school curriculum as regulated by the American Association of Medical Colleges. “Physicians” have also passed Steps 1 – 3 of the United States Medical Licensing Exam (USMLE). The general public agrees, as a survey by the American Medical Association (AMA) found that 88% of patients felt that only licensed medical doctors (MD) and doctors of osteopathy (DO) should be allowed to use the title of “physician.” Furthermore, in Maryland “physicians” are regulated by the Board of Physicians which is tasked with protecting the public by ensuring that “physicians” meet basic standards of education and training, as outlined above. The Board of Physicians is the only regulatory body that requires passing a licensing exam created by the medical community as a whole – the current iteration being the USMLE. Despite these facts, patients often don’t understand who represents a “physician” and who does not. One of my own patients recently presented for a second opinion after seeing another “foot and ankle doctor.” After some investigating, the other provider turned out to be a podiatrist and not a licensed MD or DO. The patient was rightfully confused. In the same AMA survey cited above, only 55% of patients felt it was easy to identify a licensed “physician” by reading provider credentials, services performed, and/or marketing materials. Allowing niche providers in the broader medical community, podiatrists or otherwise, to call themselves “physicians” has the potential to create more confusion and angst amongst the general public.