

Education, Skill and Training Dictate Appropriate Scope of Practice

Scope Issues Likely to Emerge:

- Allowing optometrists to perform ophthalmologic procedures.
- Allowing advanced practice nurses to prescribe narcotics.
- Allowing psychologists to obtain prescriptive authority.
- Allowing alternative medicine practitioners to “practice” without state regulation or licensure.

Ohio Academy of Family Physicians (OAFP) has long supported the use of non-physician allied health practitioners, working in collaboration with physicians, to provide high quality, cost effective care to patients. OAFP will, however, oppose any attempt to expand the scope of practice of allied health practitioners beyond what their education, skill and training safely allow non-physicians.

Differences in Education and Training

As an example, an advanced practice nurse (APN) generally holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing as well as a Master’s of Science degree (six years education beyond high school). In Ohio, APNs are required to pass a certification exam with periodic re-certification being required as well. A certified nurse practitioner may practice only in accordance with a standard care arrangement entered into with each physician with whom the nurse collaborates. (O.R.C.A. 4723.431)

Family physicians receive 11 years of training which includes four years of undergraduate work generally in science or other medically related field, four years of medical school and three years of training in an accredited family medicine residency program. After residency, the family physician must pass a comprehensive exam to become board-certified by the American Board of Family Medicine. And, in order to maintain board-certification, family physicians must complete at least 150 hours of continuing medical education every three years, continue to pass a re-certification exam every seven years, and annually re-certify on two concentrated medical topics. Family physicians are career-long learners continuously updating themselves on advances and developments in medicine.

Physician as Leader of the Healthcare Team

Logic tells us that the eleven years of training necessary to become a board-certified family physician is not equivalent to the six or less years of training required for other non-physician allied health providers. Nor does logic tell us that better healthcare outcomes will be achieved by healthcare professionals with less training.

State law requires, with good reason, that mid-level providers like advanced practice nurses, practice in collaborative roles with physicians. Training in medical school and residency best qualifies family physicians to lead the patient’s medical team.

Patient safety is and should always be the first priority.

