

AAAA Statement on Clinical Doctorate Degrees

The American Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants is dedicated to maintaining the standards of the profession and the specialty by remaining current with the ongoing changes and emerging needs in health care delivery while promoting the safety and upholding the rights of all patients undergoing medical treatment involving an anesthesia provider.

A recent proliferation of entry-level clinical doctorate degrees into the educational models of non-physician providers has caused a commensurate increase in the use of the title “doctor” in the healthcare system. Inappropriately, the title "resident" and "doctor" has been used in the clinical setting by students and graduates of these programs despite their non-physician status. This trend is a recognized source of potential confusion for patients concerning their medical care and has potential negative implications with respect to scope of practice infringement and conflict of interest, decreased professional diversity, increased health care costs, and aggravation of provider shortages.

The AAAA believes that the practice of medicine remains the domain of physicians and that the entry-level doctorate degree for the practice of medicine is the MD/DO. Physicians are integral members and leaders of the health care team. In the interest of patient safety, Anesthesiologist Assistants practice exclusively in, promote, and are dedicated to the Anesthesia Care Team as defined by the AAAA and ASA. The AAAA is committed to instilling confidence in the public by encouraging practitioners to adhere to established ethical norms and regional legal constraints. Furthermore, we believe in optimizing the use of all provider resources to deliver health care to everyone.

In the interest of patient safety and provider transparency, the AAAA does not endorse an entry-level doctoral degree for Anesthesiologist Assistants.

Over the past three decades, the master’s degree has become firmly established as the singular entry level terminal degree for Anesthesiologist Assistants. Our educational programs emphasize specialized clinical knowledge and the application of such knowledge to clinical practice. The fundamental elements of AA curriculum are standardized and evaluated based on defined outcome-focused competencies. This proven educational model for training Anesthesiologist Assistant results in the provision of competent and accessible practitioners who deliver high quality, patient care.

The AAAA encourages continued learning and skill development for AA practitioners including the completion of advanced competencies and additional instruction to enhance leadership and education. Optional post-graduate training should promote development of the profession but the attainment of higher degrees should not be recognized in the clinical setting as only appropriately-qualified physician practitioners should be referred to as “doctor”.