



127 Washington Avenue, East Building, 3rd Floor, North Haven, CT 06473
Phone (203) 865-0587 Fax (203) 865-4997 www.csms.org

Connecticut State Medical Society Testimony on
Senate Bill 171 An Act Concerning Doctor Of Physical Therapy Designation
February 28, 2018

Senator Gerratana, Senator Somers, Representative Steinberg and members of the Public Health Committee, on behalf of the physicians and physicians in training of the Connecticut State Medical Society (CSMS) thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony to you today on Senate bill 171 An Act Concerning Doctor of Physical Designation.

CSMS does not oppose Senate Bill 171, but asks that the wording be amended to provide transparency as to the specific degree that enables the word “doctor” to be used. We recognize that legitimate holders of advanced doctoral degrees are entitled to use the title to which they have put so much time and effort into obtaining. We would however, remind the Public Health Committee that the title of “doctor” in this context confers documentation only of the education necessary to obtain advanced expertise in a specific area, in this case physical therapy. It does not denote or imply ability in the general realm that the public associates with medical practice and the common use of the word “doctor.” Patients are entitled to clear communication about the training and field of expertise of their healthcare providers.

Over the past decade there has been an exponential increase in the number and types of healthcare providers and services available to patients. To help grapple with these changes, we, as a society, have begun working to empower patients to actively participate in their care, and to choose quality and efficacy over quantity. However, with the vast array of providers and services available, it can be difficult for patients to make an informed choice as to the best care for them and their lifestyle. Many insurance industry, business, medical, and consumer groups have begun promoting healthy choices through various programs. These programs rely on the patient’s ability to access meaningful, helpful, and accurate information about the care and providers in question. This information currently can be very hard to find.

Patients deserve to know the credentials of their healthcare provider without confusion regarding the meaning of credentials. For example, is the doctor able to diagnose or prescribe? Not all holders of doctorate degrees obtain that ability. Transparency is particularly critical in the field of medicine where small decisions can sometimes have big consequences and where patients may be improperly swayed by assumptions made about their provider’s ability or expertise. The authority health care providers exude can be a liability if patients are intimidated and reluctant to ask questions. The doctorate degree is intended to enhance care, not diminish it. To do the former it must not be debased by misrepresentation or confusion.

We hope that this committee will consider language that empowers and protects consumers by requiring providers clearly and prominently display their credentials in all communications and patient interactions. The holder of a Doctorate of Physical Therapy should be required to use the word “doctor” only in its appropriate context, never in isolation, and always in close association with the words “of Physical Therapy”. For the sake of transparency and to benefit patient health and safety, we suggest that the language of the bill be changed to specifically reflect this requirement.