

WASHINGTON STATE MEDICAL ASSOCIATION
HOUSE OF DELEGATES

Resolution: ___
(A-17)

Subject: Strengthening the Physician-Physician Assistant Relationship
in Washington

Introduced by: ___ (Delegate, Young Physician Section)

Referred to: Reference Committee ___

WHEREAS, physician assistants provide cost-efficient and supplemental medical services to underserved rural populations, which may be necessary to match the extensive health care needs of underserved rural populations.¹; and

WHEREAS, although physician assistants receive training to prepare them to practice under a physician-led team, this training does not provide the breadth or scope of training necessary for independent clinical practice; and

WHEREAS, there has been concern among physician assistants in Washington about the long-term viability of their profession; and

WHEREAS, there can be barriers to creating a strong physician-physician assistant relationship in larger hospital systems, in some cases due to inadequate compensation for necessary physician supervision.; and

WHEREAS, there has been recent action in Olympia on this issue, including HB 1771 that was introduced in the 2017 legislative session to circumvent RCW 18.71A.030 by allowing physician assistants who receive a Doctor of Medical Science degree to practice independently as long as he or she is affiliated with a hospital or group practice, including expertise outside the scope of primary care.^{2,3,4}; and

WHEREAS, the American Medical Association's position is that that a physician assistant should function under the direction of and supervision by a duly qualified licensed physician.⁵

RESOLVED, that our WSMA oppose legislative efforts to establish autonomous regulatory boards meant to license, regulate, and discipline physician assistants outside of the existing state medical licensing and regulatory bodies' authority and purview. (New HOD Policy)

RESOLVED, that our WSMA endorse that a physician assistant should only be authorized to provide patient care services only so long as the assistant is functioning under the direction and supervision of a physician or group of physicians who application for utilization has been approved by the state medical licensing board; and be it further (New HOD Policy)

RESOLVED, that our WSMA recommend that the state medical licensing board, in its review of applications for utilization of a physician assistant, should take special care to insure that the proposed physician assistant functions not be of a type which: (a) would unreasonably expand the professional scope of practice of the supervising physician, (b) cannot be performed safely and effectively by the physician assistant, or (c) would authorize the unlicensed practice of medicine; and be it further (New HOD Policy)

RESOLVED, that our WSMA endorses that a physician assistant should function under the direction of and supervision by a duly qualified physician who must always maintain the ultimate responsibility to assure that high quality care is provided to every patient. (New HOD Policy)

RESOLVED, that the WSMA should encourage hospitals and large healthcare systems to decrease administrative barriers that may limit utilizations of physician assistants, particularly in rural underserved areas.

RESOLVED, that our WSMA support newer technologies that may facilitate increased access through remote physician supervision of physician-assistants, but only when approved by the state medical licensing board, including requirements for regular reporting to the supervising physician, frequent site visits by that physician, and arrangement for immediate communication with the supervising physician at all times.

REFERENCES:

¹ Henry LR, Hooker RS, Yates KL. The role of physician assistants in rural health care: a systematic review of the literature. *J Rural Health*. 2011 Spring;27(2):220-9. doi: 10.1111/j.1748-0361.2010.00325.x. Epub 2010 Sep 2.

² RCW 18.71A.030. <http://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=18.71A.030>

³ HB 1771. State of Washington 65th Legislature 2017 Regular Session.

⁴ Columbia Physical Therapy, Inc., P.S. v. Benton Franklin Orthopedic Assocs., PLLC, No. 81734-1 (March 18, 2010).

⁵ Physician Assistants H-35.989, Allied Professions, Board of Trustees, AMA 2011 (attached).