

## PHYSICIAN VOICES FOR PATIENT SAFETY

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### Frequently Asked Questions

#### What is the Health Occupations Revisions General Amendment Act of 2023 (B25-545)?

In November 2023, DC Health introduced B25-545, the Health Occupations Revisions General Amendment Act of 2023. This bill is a comprehensive rewrite of the law overseeing medical licensing and regulation in Washington, DC. Unfortunately, the bill as written would overhaul scope of practice, place allied health professionals in oversight positions of medical licensing, and remove the physician from the center of the care team.

#### How are DC licensed physicians reacting to the bill?

88% of DC physicians surveyed by the Medical Society of DC (MSDC) oppose the bill.

#### How would the bill impact me?

The bill would remove physicians from the team in caring for patients process despite physicians being the most appropriate healthcare team leaders.

1. The bill would allow independent practice to advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) in the District.
2. The bill would not distinguish between different APRN specialties.
3. The bill would not clearly define the scope of practice for APRNs and the extent of experience required before embarking on independent practice.
4. The bill would not delineate any additional requirements for independent practice.
5. APRNs would immediately be able to start independent practice upon certification.

#### How does the bill impact patients in DC?

As currently written, the bill would weaken patient care by expanding the ability of non-physician professionals to practice medicine beyond their training. DC residents deserve access to proper medical care from professionals with the right knowledge and experience to ensure appropriate diagnosis and treatment.

#### Does MSDC advocate against allied professionals?

No! Physicians work closely with varied allied health professionals and value the teamwork in caring for patients. But we believe physicians are the most appropriate healthcare team leaders. Physicians spend significant amount of time in education and training should remain at the center of patient care.

Only Board-Certified physicians complete three to seven years of residency after medical school to become experts in their fields. Only physicians who successfully complete their residency can sit for their board exams, and passing this exam shows competency in their field. There is no comparable training for allied health professionals. DC residents will be harmed by expanding the scope of practice to undertrained practitioners.

*But, what about Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs)?*

- Anesthesiologists have 5-7 times more patient-care hours than CRNAs, and are required to complete medical school versus CRNAs who only need a bachelor's degree.
- Anesthesia is very safe, but in the rare cases there is a reaction the consequences can be fatal or lead to disability.
- CRNAs are a valuable part of a care team but need to be supervised by a physician who can intervene if application goes wrong.
- MSDC is looking to ensure patients receive the best and safest care, which is collaborative care.

*But, what about Pharmacists?*

- Pharmacists are not medically trained to diagnose, refer, or order patient tests.
- Pharmacists lack the time and space to do what the bill permits—91% of pharmacists in a national survey rate their workload as high or excessively high.
- 75% of pharmacists in chain settings say they already have so much work to do that everything cannot be done well.
- Pharmacists lack the medical space or training to respond if a person they are seeing has a reaction to a test or treatment.

*But, what about Chiropractors?*

- Chiropractors are not medical professionals, they train in how certain body parts work.
- Allowing them to manage medical conditions is not part of their training and could endanger patient safety.
- The bill allows them to be considered “primary health care providers” when their training is simply in how the skeleton works, not medicine.

*But, what about Physical Therapists?*

- Physical therapists lack the medical training to order tests and outline medical treatments.
- This bill would not expand health equity—the majority of DC physical therapists (as of 2022) operate in areas in Wards 2 and 3 where there are already physicians.
- Studies show independent physician assistants tend to increase the number of tests ordered and cost of care. PTs have even less medical training meaning this bill will drive up healthcare costs for patients and providers.

### What is MSDC doing about the bill?

The Medical Society of the District of Columbia (MSDC) is the leading voice for physicians in Washington, DC, committed to uniting physicians to advocate for physician-led health care in Washington, DC that protects patients from harm and increases access to quality care. MSDC is leading a coalition of Washington, DC specialty medical societies to advocate against the Health Occupations Revisions General Amendment Act of 2023.

MSDC has long advocated that a physician is the most qualified professional at the head of a care team. Physicians have the most health education and pre-practice experience of any health professional, and thus must be involved in all but the most mundane health care decisions. Allied health professionals are a valuable part of the care team, but their medical education and experience limits their role.

Specifically, we are asking for the following changes to the proposed bill:

1. Do not expand the type of health care professionals allowed to prescribe narcotics in light of the ongoing opioid crisis in the District.
2. Do not allow podiatrists to apply anesthesia.
3. Do not allow pharmacists to order and interpret lab testing without physician supervision because they do not have the proper training to do so independently.
4. Do not allow allied health professionals to administer anesthesia without physician supervision since only physicians have the proper amount of training to do so independently.
5. Do not allow athletic trainers to “practice medicine” beyond administering first aid.
6. Do not expand chiropractic care to include “primary medical care” currently reserved for physicians because they lack the proper training to do so independently.
7. Do not allow physical therapists to order radiologic imaging without physician supervision because they lack the proper training to do so independently.
8. Do not remove the current restrictions on scope of practice for allied health nurses because their level of training does not match that of physicians.

### What are the next steps with the bill?

The DC Council will consider the bill in May.

### What can I do about the bill?

We urge physicians licensed in Washington, DC to contact the Mayor’s Office and DC Council to express any concerns they may have on the proposed expansion to scope of practice for allied health professionals in the bill as a misguided risk to their health.

[Click here to send an individual letter today.](#)