

New state laws aim to clear up patient confusion

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Two states last month passed legislation that should provide increased clarity and transparency for patients trying to discern the qualifications of their health care professionals, bringing the total number of states with similar laws to 18.

West Virginia and Utah passed bills requiring clinicians to wear name tags that identify the clinician's name and license type during direct patient encounters. Both laws, and the 17 others previously passed in other states, were based on AMA model state legislation, part of the AMA's Truth in Advertising campaign launched in 2009.

Utah's bill also prohibits deceptive or misleading representations by a health care professional, and makes it unlawful conduct for someone to wear a misleading ID during a patient encounter.

With an ever-growing variety of health care choices, patients deserve to know who provides their health care. Patients strongly support a physician-led health care team, but AMA surveys demonstrate that many are confused about the level of education and training of the people who provide their care. Currently, patients mistake physicians with nonphysician clinicians, and many do not know that certain medical specialists are physicians.

Asking medical professionals to display their credentials and capabilities allows patients to make informed choices about their health care. For this reason, the AMA's Truth in Advertising campaign seeks to give states guidance on enacting legislation that requires all health care professionals, physicians and non-physicians alike, to accurately and clearly disclose their training and qualifications.

“The AMA is concerned that this simple mistake may cause false expectations and impair patients’ ability to make informed health care decisions,” the AMA said in a letter to West Virginia Governor Earl Ray Tomblin in support of that state’s truth-in-advertising bill.