



Position Statement
on
The Practice of Dermatology:
Protecting and Preserving Patient Safety and Quality Care
(Approved by the Board of Directors on May 22, 2010)

The guiding principle for all dermatologists is to practice ethical medicine with the highest possible standards to ensure that the best interests and welfare of each patient are guaranteed.

The Practice of Dermatology (Cutaneous Medicine)

The practice of dermatology includes, but is not limited to, diagnosis, treatment, or correction of human conditions, ailments, diseases, injuries, or infirmities of the skin, hair, nails and mucous membranes, by any medical, surgical, pathologic or aesthetic means, medications, methods, devices, or instruments. These conditions may be primary cutaneous ailments or part of a systemic disease.

The practice of dermatology includes, but is not limited to, performing any act or procedure that can alter or cause biologic change or damage to the skin and subcutaneous tissue.¹

Any procedure using any approved device that can alter or cause biologic change or damage, should be performed only by an appropriately trained physician or non-physician personnel under the direct, on-site supervision of an appropriately trained physician.

The practice of dermatology, in accordance with this position statement, can occur in varied settings. The highest level of standards to practice dermatology should be applied across all settings.

Who is a Dermatologist?

A dermatologist is a licensed medical doctor and the only residency-trained physician specialist fully educated in the science and art of cutaneous medicine, which includes the medical, surgical, pathologic and aesthetic conditions of the skin, hair, nails, and mucous membranes, and who is eligible for board certification from the American Board

¹ Procedures which can alter or cause biologic change or damage the skin and subcutaneous tissue include but are not limited to: the use of all lasers, scalpel, light sources, microwave energy, electrical impulses, chemical application, particle sanding, the injection or insertion of foreign or natural substances, or soft tissue augmentation.

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of Dermatology, the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, or the American Osteopathic Board of Dermatology.

A dermatologist must have an extensive understanding of cutaneous medicine, surgery, and pathology. Patients receive the highest quality dermatologic care when their care is provided by a dermatologist with specialized medical training and expertise. The delivery of dermatologic services by a non-dermatologist or unsupervised non-physician personnel is limited and may result in a higher incidence of adverse events, complications, or suboptimal results.

Those who regulate and deliver medical care have an obligation to inform the public of the qualifications and limitations of those who provide their dermatologic care. All personnel working in a dermatologic setting should identify or disclose their board-certification (if any) and/or licensure to each patient. This could be disclosed verbally or displayed prominently in writing.

Training & Education

A dermatologist is ultimately responsible for the care and safety of patients in his or her practice.

At certain times, and under the direction of a board-certified dermatologist, the practice of dermatology requires a team approach and may include other providers practicing in a dermatologic setting, including but not limited to: non-dermatologist physicians; advanced practitioners; allied health professionals; licensed personnel; and other personnel.

Training of all personnel should be commensurate with their licensure and/or experience and the degree of difficulty or complexity of the medical care, diagnoses, treatments, procedures/techniques, services or tasks being delegated to them by a dermatologist. Optimum practice standards require that a dermatologist maintain written documentation on the training and education received by all personnel to which medical care, procedures/techniques, services or tasks are delegated.

Delegation & Supervision

The optimum degree of dermatologic care is delivered when a dermatologist, as defined here, provides direct, on-site supervision to all non-dermatologist personnel. Each practice should maintain written procedures regarding appropriate delegation and supervision protocols for all personnel within the practice.

When practicing in a dermatological setting, non-dermatologist physicians and advanced practice providers such as nurse practitioners and physician assistants, consistent with their appropriate training and experience, should be directly supervised

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by an on-site dermatologist. In exceptional or extenuating circumstances when a dermatologist is not available on-site written protocols and procedures should provide a mechanism for a patient to be seen by a dermatologist in a timely fashion in person or via teledermatology.

Licensed allied health professionals, including but not limited to registered nurses and licensed practical nurses, when practicing in a dermatological setting, should only provide care after a patient receives an initial evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment plan from a dermatologist. Allied health professionals should be directly supervised by an on-site dermatologist when providing care or performing specific procedures/techniques.

Aestheticians, cosmetologists and electrologists are not legally permitted to engage in the practice of medicine. When practicing in a dermatological setting, these licensed professionals should only perform delegated services after a patient receives an initial evaluation, diagnosis and treatment plan from a dermatologist. These licensed professionals should only perform delegated services under the direct, on-site supervision of a dermatologist.

Licensed and unlicensed medical assistants are not legally permitted to engage in the practice of medicine. Prior to any task being performed by a licensed or unlicensed medical assistant in a dermatological setting, a patient must first receive an evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment plan from a dermatologist. Medical assistants should only assist a dermatologist with specific tasks under a dermatologist's direct, personal supervision.

The regulatory language governing physician delegation of health care services to non-physician personnel varies greatly from state to state. However, the common theme in state regulations is that physicians may only delegate procedures/techniques or tasks to those individuals that are competent and qualified, by their training, experience, or licensure. In addition, delegated tasks or procedures/techniques must be within the delegating dermatologist's area of expertise. No care, procedure/technique, service or task should be delegated to personnel who do not possess the proper training and education to perform such care, procedure/technique, service or task.

This Position Statement is intended to offer physicians guiding principles regarding the practice of dermatology and delegation of these tasks and procedures. This Position Statement is not intended to establish a legal standard of care. Physicians should use their personal and professional judgment in interpreting these guidelines and applying them to the particular circumstances of their individual practice arrangements.