

September 25, 2017

Deborah G. Schult, PhD
Assistant Director
Health Services Division
Federal Bureau of Prisons
320 First St., NW
Washington, DC 20534

Dear Dr. Schult:

On behalf of the American Medical Association (AMA) and our physician and medical student members, I am writing to highlight the need for patients in correctional facilities to be properly educated about the credentials of health care professionals who provide treatment in these facilities.

Patients are confused about the differences between various types of health care providers. Often, patients mistakenly believe they are meeting with physicians when they are not. As has been widely reported, a high percentage of incarcerated individuals suffer from mental illness. The number of inmates with mental illness greatly exceeds the number of individuals obtaining treatment in hospitals or state psychiatric facilities. These patients are particularly vulnerable to confusion about the differences between various types of health care providers.

Confusion about the credentials of the practitioner who is providing specific patient care undermines the reliability of the health care system and can put patients at risk. The AMA believes that patients deserve to have increased clarity and transparency in health care, and as such, believes that all health care professionals should accurately and clearly disclose to patients their training and qualifications.

It is the responsibility of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) Health Services Division to ensure that incarcerated patients are properly educated about the credentials of those health care professionals who treat them. These patients should have access to information that accurately identifies the qualifications and degrees attained by their treating providers.

As such, we request that the BOP:

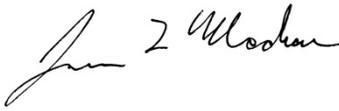
- (1) Require health care professionals with direct contact with incarcerated patients to wear an identification badge that indicates the individual's name and credentials as appropriate (i.e., MD, DO, PhD, RN, LPN, DC, DPM, DDS, etc.), to differentiate between those who have achieved a Doctorate, and those with other types of credentials; and

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(2) Require non-physician health care professionals with direct contact with patients, and who present themselves to the patient as a “doctor,” specifically and simultaneously define the nature of their doctorate degree; and prohibit these individuals from referring to themselves as “physicians.”

The AMA thanks you for your consideration of these comments. If you have any questions, please contact Kristin Schleiter, JD, LLM, Senior Legislative Attorney, Advocacy Resource Center, at kristin.schleiter@ama-assn.org or (312) 464-4783.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim L. Madara". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

James L. Madara, MD

cc: AMA Minority Affairs Section
Gerald E. Harmon, MD