

The following letter to the editor was submitted on behalf of the Coalition for Patients' Rights™ in response to an article in Modern Healthcare titled, "Primary Dispute" by Joe Carlson. The article was published on April 5, 2010 and focused on scope of practice issues and the growing national demand for access to primary care. The letter to the editor below appeared in the April 26 issue of Modern Healthcare. Access to Modern Healthcare is by subscription only.

To the Editor:

Joe Carlson's piece "Primary Dispute" hits on the undeniable reality that health care reform will bring an influx of patients into our health care system and that enabling access to health care professionals who are not doctors of medicine (MDs) or osteopathy (DOs) will be critical to meeting growing demand.

Using well-educated and skilled health care professionals to deliver this care ought not to be controversial in the least. Research has consistently demonstrated that "extender" health care professionals safely deliver high quality care. While physicians paint a scary picture that providers will "get in over their heads," the truth is that the rhetoric doesn't hold up against the research. The scope of practice of all providers is clearly defined within the required skills and training of each health care professional, and if issues develop that are outside the provider's expertise, then patient's are referred. Patients are not being cared for on a deserted island, isolated from physicians. Instead, they should have access to the health care professional that suits their health and wellness needs.

Additionally, the idea that an MD is a prerequisite to providing care to patients is out of touch. The key question is whether the right provider with the right skills is caring for the right health concerns. If we want to be successful in improving our health care system, we must do a better job of using non-MD/DO health care professionals who can lower costs, and maintain (and even improve) quality for patients.

We were encouraged to see some physician groups acknowledging the importance of health care professions partnering with one another, not fighting for "turf," so that we can meet the growing needs of patients. Unfortunately, the AMA's efforts to limit the practice scopes of non-MD/DO professionals run counter to everything patients need right now – quality, access, and affordability.

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