

Statement of Board policy regarding the use of the term “doctor” by practitioners of physical therapy (adopted July 12, 2012)

At a recent meeting of the **State of Nevada Board of Physical Therapy Examiners** (hereinafter, the “BOARD”), the issue of the term “doctor” arose, and under what circumstances a licensed physical therapist in the State of Nevada may use that term in communications with others. This letter represents the BOARD’S policy on this issue.

It is the position of the BOARD that there is an important distinction that all practitioners must recognize, as between one’s *licensing* designation and one’s *educational* designation. Licensing designations are just as they sound; an indication to the public at large as to the statutory “office” or “position” held by that practitioner. In Nevada, licensing designations in physical therapy come in only two (2) varieties: “Physical Therapist”, or “PT”, as abbreviated, and “Physical Therapist’s Assistant”, or “PTA”, as abbreviated. *See*, NRS 640.021 and NRS 640.0213. Educational designations, however, are varied and are not mandated under the statutes which govern the practice of physical therapy. Indeed, this BOARD possesses no jurisdiction whatsoever over individuals strictly on the basis of their educational designations, but solely their licensing ones.

Consequently, practitioners are obligated to disclose their licensing designation in communicating with the public, but are not obligated to disclose, or even mention, their educational designation. Licensees may elect to disclose their education designation, including the term “doctor”, pursuant to the following guidelines.

In everyday use, the BOARD now adopts the following guidelines for all practitioners in the State of Nevada who hold a Doctorate Degree in Physical Therapy, in order to prevent public confusion as to this issue:

- 1) Practitioners **must** refer to themselves by their licensing designation when communicating with the public, either verbally or in written form.
 - *Verbal Examples:* John Smith, PT or John Smith, Physical Therapist
 - *Written Examples:* John Smith, PT or John Smith, Physical Therapist
- 2) Practitioners **may** refer to themselves or other practitioners verbally as “Doctor”, when communicating with the public.
- 3) Practitioners **may elect** to refer to themselves as “Doctor” in verbal and written communications, but must do so only when also referencing their licensing designation.
 - *Verbal Examples:* I am Doctor John Smith, your Physical Therapist.
 - *Written Examples:* Doctor John Smith, PT, *or* John Smith, Physical Therapist, Doctorate in Physical Therapy *or* John Smith, PT, Doctorate in Physical Therapy *or* John Smith, Physical Therapist, DPT).

These simple procedures should provide clarity on this issue. Licensees are reminded that the patients must always be made aware of the role of all persons who are treating them at all times.

Finally, it is the judgment of the BOARD that these guidelines do not pertain to practitioners in an educational institution or those who hold a designation they have rightfully attained in some other discipline (Example: PhD).