

# New Jersey State Nurses Association (NJSNA) Releases Position Statement



## Affirming the Use of the Title Doctor by Nurses with Doctoral Degrees

The NJSNA Congress on Policy and Practice (COPP) is pleased to announce the publication of a new position statement, **"Affirming the Use of the Title Doctor by Nurses with Doctoral Degrees."** This essential document asserts that nurses with earned doctoral degrees have the right to use the title "Doctor," provided they clearly state their specific credentials to ensure patient transparency. This new position statement was made possible by the dedicated efforts of the COPP Position Statement Subcommittee. We extend our sincere gratitude to Leticia Chin, MSN, RN, CCRN, Margaret Daingerfield, EdD, RN, CNE, Sandra Foley, DNP, RN, Paula Greenbaum, MSN, RN, CMSRN, NPd-BC, CHPN, Laurie Huryk, MSN, RN, NI-BC, Susan H. Weaver, PhD, RN, CRNI, NEA-BC, and Ken Wolski, MPA, RN for their expertise and tireless work on this project. All nurses are encouraged to review this position statement to inform their practice.

<https://njsna.org/position-statements/>

### New Jersey State Nurses Association (NJSNA) Position Statement Affirming the Use of the Title Doctor by Nurses with Doctoral Degrees

#### Statement

The New Jersey State Nurses Association (NJSNA) asserts that patients have a fundamental right to full transparency regarding the credentials of their healthcare providers. In alignment with this principle, NJSNA fully supports and affirms the right of nurses who have earned doctoral degrees, such as the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) or the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), to use the title Doctor.

#### Explanation of Issues

In the case of *Palmer v. Bonta*, DNP-prepared nurses challenged a California law (FindLaw, n.d.) restricting the title Doctor to licensed physicians, arguing it violated their First Amendment rights. A U.S. District Court judge upheld the law, classifying the use of the title by non-physicians as potentially misleading commercial speech. The ruling was supported by the American Medical Association's (AMA) *Truth in Advertising Survey*, which demonstrated patient confusion in distinguishing DNP's from MDs. The court also noted that the title could serve as a financial motivator to attract patients (American Medical Association, 2025).

Indiana, Minnesota, and Tennessee have similar laws to California restricting the use of the title Doctor by physicians as truth in advertising (O'Reilly, 2025). New Jersey takes a different approach. The *New Jersey Health Care Transparency Act* (2020), **signed into law on December 14, 2020**, mandates that healthcare professionals communicate their licensure and degree to patients.

NJSNA acknowledges nurses' right to use their earned title and practice to the full extent of their education and licensure. Recognizing the academic achievements of all healthcare professionals, including nurses, fosters interprofessional respect and ultimately benefits patient care across all settings.

#### Rationale

Academic institutions award a terminal degree in a variety of professions. The degree confers the right to use the title. The Doctor title is an earned acknowledgment of the highest level of academic

achievement and clinical or research expertise in the nursing profession.

To ensure clarity and prevent public confusion, NJSNA advocates for the use of the Doctor title in conjunction with the professional's specific licensure and degree. This practice provides more information to the patient, not less, and respects the professional accomplishments of the individual. ■

#### References

- American Medical Association (2025, September 26). Court upholds California's truth in advertising law as constitutional. Retrieved 12/22/25 from <https://www.ama-assn.org/health-care-advocacy/advocacy-update/sept-26-2025-judicial-advocacy-update>
- FindLaw. (n.d.). California Code, Business and Professions Code - BPC § 2054. Retrieved 12/22/25 <https://codes.findlaw.com/ca/business-and-professions-code/bpc-sect-2054/>
- Greenbaum, P. (2026). Academic Achievement v. Regulation: Using the Title Doctor. *New Jersey Nurse*, 56(2), 11.
- New Jersey Health Care Transparency Act, N.J. Stat. Ann. § 45:1-67 (2020). <https://njleg.state.nj.us/bill-search/2020/S2465>
- O'Reilly, K.B. (2025, October 3). Federal court agrees: NPs can't call themselves "doctor." American Medical Association. Retrieved 12/22/25 <https://www.ama-assn.org/practice-management/scope-practice/federal-court-agrees-nps-can-t-call-themselves-doctor>
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