

November 05, 2018

The Honorable Deborah A. Armstrong
Chair, New Mexico Legislative Health and Human Services Committee
2015 Dietz Place NW
Albuquerque, NM 87107

Dear Chair Armstrong,

I am writing on behalf of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS) regarding a proposal to license the practice of naturopathy, which was discussed at the Legislative Health and Human Services Committee's interim meeting on October 12, 2018. ASPS is the largest association of plastic surgeons in the world, representing more than 7,000 members and 94 percent of all board-certified plastic surgeons in the United States – including 25 board-certified plastic surgeons in New Mexico. Our mission is to advance quality care for plastic surgery patients and promote public policy that protects patient safety.

ASPS strongly opposes any legislative action taken by the committee that would authorize naturopaths to perform minor office and surgical procedures. While we understand that naturopaths offer patients a unique and alternative form of medicine, it is our firm belief that naturopaths do not have the medical training necessary to practice allopathic or osteopathic medicine. Therefore, should any future proposals or legislation regarding licensing be considered by the committee, it is imperative that all committee members have a clear understanding of the immense discrepancies in training between naturopaths and licensed physicians.

Allowing naturopaths – who are not physicians – to perform and oversee procedures that fall squarely within the practice of medicine is ill-advised. As surgeons, we encourage you to uphold the high level of patient care that has been established and permit only licensed physicians who meet appropriate education, training, and professional standards to perform surgery.

The American College of Surgeons (ACS) is the world's largest surgical association, and it provides the highest level of surgical care standards to its more than 80,000 members. ACS defines surgery as¹:

Surgery is performed for the purpose of structurally altering the human body by incision or destruction of tissues and is part of the practice of medicine. Surgery also is the diagnostic or therapeutic treatment of conditions or disease processes by any instruments causing localized alteration or transportation of live human tissue, which include lasers, ultrasound, ionizing radiation, scalpels, probes, and needles. The tissue can be cut, burned, vaporized, frozen, sutured, probed, or manipulated by closed reduction for major dislocations and fractures, or otherwise altered by any mechanical, thermal, light-based, electromagnetic, or chemical means. Injection of diagnostic or therapeutic substances into body cavities, internal organs, joints, sensory organs, and the central nervous system is also considered to be surgery (this does not include administration by nursing personnel of some injections, such as subcutaneous, intramuscular, and

¹ State of the states: Defining surgery. The Bulletin. <http://bulletin.facs.org/2012/05/state-of-the-states-defining-surgery>. Published June 6, 2016. Accessed December 19, 2017.

intravenous when ordered by a physician). All of these surgical procedures are invasive, including those that are performed with lasers, and the risks of any surgical intervention are not eliminated by using a light knife or laser in place of a metal knife or scalpel. Patient safety and quality of care are paramount, and the College therefore believes that patients should be assured that individuals who perform these types of surgery are licensed physicians (defined as doctors of medicine or osteopathy) who meet appropriate professional standards.

Therefore, if a naturopath – who is not a physician surgeon (e.g., an allopathic or osteopathic physician) – were to alter the superficial tissues during minor office procedures; perform a laser; use an electromagnetic device; or administer an intradermal, subcutaneous, or intramuscular injection, it would fall squarely under the definition of surgery. This would entail that naturopaths would be acting outside of the scope of their training and experience.

Plastic surgeons go through drastically different training than naturopaths. We must attain a core medical and surgical education while completing seven to ten years of training, which includes increasing responsibility and decision-making authority in the hospital setting. Board-certified plastic surgeons must: (1) earn a medical degree; (2) complete three to six years of full-time experience in a residency training program accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME); and (3) the last three years of training must be completed in the same program. Ultimately, surgeons will train as much as four-times-as-long as naturopaths.

In summation, allowing naturopaths to practice medicine without the requisite medical school and residency training would compound the risk to patient safety and lower the standard of surgical care in the state. Due to those potential patient safety issues, such as the possibility of complications arising from surgery and serious risk injury, it is critical that such procedures are performed by physician surgeons who have the comprehensive training and board certification to handle those complications when they do occur.

We urge you to protect the citizens of New Mexico from inadequately trained naturopaths by rejecting any policy that would authorize the practice of medicine and surgical procedures within the naturopathic scope of practice. Thank you for your consideration of our position on this important issue. Please don't hesitate to contact Patrick Hermes, ASPS's Director of Advocacy and Government Relations, at pghermes@plasticsurgery.org or (847) 228-3331 with any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alan Matarasso, MD". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alan Matarasso, MD, FACS
President
American Society of Plastic Surgeons