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ASHA/AAA

Comments on the AMA Scope of Practice document for Audiology

Missouri Academy of Audiology joins with ASHA and AAA in opposition to the AMA writing a Scope of Practice document for Audiologists. The Introduction begins by stating that the AMA intention with this document is "aiding physicians in countering advocacy efforts of audiologists to expand their scope of practice to allow for direct access to patients without a physician referral."

There is clearly a conflict of interest since the AMA is writing this to define the scope of practice for an audiologist while trying to prevent audiologists from seeing patients without a physician's referral or supervision. This is self-serving for physicians. By holding the purse strings requiring a physician's referral to an audiologist, the AMA is trying to keep all patients under their sole control to increase their own income. Audiologists' are highly trained to recognize medical conditions that require the attention of and referral to a physician, including asymmetries, infection and conductive hearing loss. There is no need for a physician to see every patient with presbycusis or a noise induced hearing loss. In addition, the physician is not trained to detect mild or high frequency hearing loss by their medical exam. So how can a medical exam be necessary for every patient to see an audiologist?

The American Osteopathic Association also advocates direct physician supervision of non-physician clinicians. In this day of high cost health care, this is an unnecessary cost to Medicare and other insurances. The only one who benefits is the physician who charges more on an hourly and procedure basis than an audiologist.

Audiology is a free standing profession that does not require a physician's approval to legally practice and see patients. The only reason audiologists request a physician's referral is to meet requirements for some third party payers, which ultimately costs the insurance companies more.

The Department of Veterans Affairs has allowed veterans direct access to audiologists for the past ten years. Not only has it proven to be cost effective, but the veterans have been provided with very high quality hearing health care with sufficient data to back it up.

Health care will improve and costs will go down when direct access to audiologists is universal. It is unconscionable that the AMA is dictating their 100% control of patient dollars by requiring patients to come to their office prior to a hearing evaluation, which is how their document describes the scope of audiology.

Sincerely,

Missouri Academy of Audiology