



AAAA STATEMENT ON CLINICAL DOCTORATE DEGREES

The American Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants (AAAA) is committed to ensuring the highest standards in the profession by staying updated with the ongoing changes and emerging needs in healthcare delivery, advocating for patient safety, and upholding the rights of all patients receiving medical treatment involving an anesthesia provider.

The introduction of entry-level clinical doctorate degrees for non-physician providers has recently led to a significant increase in the usage of the title “doctor” within the healthcare system. Despite their non-physician status, this has resulted in some students and graduates of these programs erroneously using the titles “resident” and “doctor” in clinical settings. This trend may confuse patients about their medical care, leading to potential conflicts over who can perform certain medical tasks.

The AAAA believes that the practice of medicine remains the domain of physicians and that the entry-level doctorate degree for the practice of medicine should be the MD/DO. Physicians are crucial members and leaders of the healthcare team. To ensure patient safety, Certified Anesthesiologist Assistants (CAAs) should work exclusively in, promote, and support the Anesthesia Care Team, as defined by the AAAA and American Society of Anesthesiologists (ASA). The AAAA is committed to building public trust by encouraging practitioners to adhere to established ethical norms and regional legal constraints. Furthermore, we believe in maximizing the use of all provider resources to deliver healthcare.

The AAAA does not endorse an entry-level doctoral degree for CAAs to safeguard patient safety and provider transparency. Our stance comes from concerns about the potential for increased confusion and possible risks to patient safety. The AAAA advocates for clear and understandable roles within the healthcare system.

Over the past three decades, the master’s degree has become the established entry-level degree for CAAs. Our educational programs focus on specialized clinical knowledge and its application to clinical practice. The core elements of the CAA curriculum are standardized and evaluated based on specific outcome-focused competencies. This proven educational model for training CAAs results in competent, accessible practitioners who provide high-quality patient care.

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The AAAA promotes continued learning and skill development for CAAs, including completing advanced competencies and further instruction to improve leadership and education. Optional post-graduate training should support the profession's development, but attaining higher degrees should not be recognized in clinical settings. Only a qualified physician practitioner should be referred to as a "doctor."