

Scope of Practice Determination for Healthcare Providers

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For those of us who belong to legislated professions, scope of practice matters have always been and will continue to be an issue. The definition of optometry twenty years ago is very different from today's, and within the next twenty years it will likely be again transformed.

Myriad factors influence the evolution and re-visitation of relevant statutes in the future, including: graduate school curriculum and post-graduate education, pharmaceutical and technological advances, healthcare issues, consumers' needs, and optometrists' desires to provide their patients with the highest possible level of care.

Scope of practice matters tend to be viewed as "turf wars" in which one side is for the issue and one is against it, while legislators are left in the middle trying to determine the best outcome for Connecticut's citizens. It's not unlike many of the non-scope issues you must deal with regularly. However, questions of scope tend to be very technical and highly specialized, leaving legislators very uncomfortable about making the right decision. Since these issues are rarely of great public interest, it makes them even less desirable to wrestle with.

Therefore, I want to commend you for reviewing the issue of how scope of practice decisions are made and whether the system should be changed. I wish I had the answer; unfortunately I don't. I reached out to our national organization, the AOA, to see what other states have done, but regrettably each system is fraught with its unique set of problems. In most models, for example:

1. Legislature sets the basic parameters, then state board of examiners decide on the specifics
2. Legislature sets the basic parameters, then a medical director decides on the specifics for all professions
3. A panel consisting of legislators, providers and lay people reviews all scope issues and refers them to the legislature for consideration

Historically, in Connecticut, the Public Health Council has primary involvement in medical scope matters. Whenever legislation is proposed, a public hearing is held and all involved parties are able to make their cases and educate legislators regarding the nuances of the proposal, a vote is taken, and a decision is made. It may be uncomfortable at times and does not always produce the desired outcome, but the process is a democratic one and our "bird in the hand."

In conclusion, thank you for undertaking this study. I hope you are successful in finding a system that promotes professional growth, assures competency, and provides patients with the highest level of care.