

August 29, 2018

The Honorable Kurtis S. Elward, MD, MPH, FAAFP  
President, Medical Society of Virginia  
2924 Emerywood Pkwy #300  
Richmond, VA 23294

The Honorable Richard A. Szucs, MD, FACR, FSAR  
President-Elect, Medical Society of Virginia  
2924 Emerywood Pkwy #300  
Richmond, VA 23294

**RE: In support of the resolution relating to truth in advertising**

Dear President Elward and President-Elect Szucs:

On behalf of the Virginia Society of Plastic Surgeons (VASPS) and the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), we are writing to request that you pass the resolution relating to truth in advertising (TIA). VASPS is the largest association of plastic surgeons in Virginia, and in conjunction with our national affiliate, ASPS, collectively represent 202 board-certified plastic surgeons in the state. Our mission is to advance quality care for plastic surgery patients and promote public policy that protects patient safety.

Among patients and the general public, the term “board certified” has come to signify the highest achievement in clinical training and expertise. When individuals seek medical care, the knowledge that their physician is board certified assures them that they are engaging a provider with significant direct training and demonstrated, validated skill in the specialty certification advertised. As a result, it is crucial that the quality associated with the term “board certified” is protected.

While the term “board certified” is typically associated with certification by a member board of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) or the American Osteopathic Association (AOA), there are other certifying bodies that have rightly been deemed equivalent to ABMS or AOA boards. These certifying bodies require successful completion of a postgraduate training program approved by the Accreditation Commission for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) or the AOA and subsequent board certification by the ABMS or AOA in the specialty or subspecialty certified.

When a certifying body does not require complete ACGME or AOA-accredited training in the specialty/specialties it certifies, though, the result is an unacceptable degree of variability in the educational standards applied to its members. These substandard certifying bodies create their own criteria, self-designating fellowships and training qualifications, and their own standards for the acceptable level of training to achieve their certification. This is simply not found among ABMS or AOA certifications or additional certifications that are legitimately equivalent. If boards with lower standards are allowed to advertise as board certified, the term loses its value to patients seeking an adequately trained and qualified physician.

To avoid the unintended consequence of allowing diplomates of a substandard board to advertise as board certified, the Medical Society of Virginia (MSV) House of Delegates should pass the resolution relating to TIA to ensure that boards require adequate training of their diplomates. ASPS has worked with the national Truth in Advertising Coalition to craft language that ensures that the only physicians advertising as board certified are those with a breadth, scope, and duration of training that warrants it. Member organizations of the TIA Coalition have formally approved this language, including the: American Medical Association, American Osteopathic Association, American Academy of Dermatology Association, American Society for Dermatologic Surgery

Association, American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, American Academy of Otolaryngology - Head and Neck Surgery, American College of Emergency Physicians, and American Society of Plastic Surgeons. ASPS will be happy to provide MSV with recommendations on how to amend existing regulations once this issue is further along in the policy priorities development process.

This is a matter of patient safety. Patients deserve to know that the board certification claimed by a physician is a true indicator of his or her training and skill. Therefore, we thank you for your consideration of VASPS and ASPS's comments and urge you to pass the resolution relating to TIA. Please do not hesitate to contact Patrick Hermes, ASPS's Director of Advocacy and Government Relations, with any questions at [phermes@plasticsurgery.org](mailto:phermes@plasticsurgery.org) or (847) 228-3331.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Jeffrey E. Janis in black ink.

Jeffrey E. Janis, MD, FACS  
President, American Society of Plastic Surgeons

Handwritten signature of Enrique Silberblatt in black ink, with "MD FACS" written below it.

Enrique Silberblatt, MD, FACS  
President, Virginia Society of Plastic Surgeons

cc: Members, Medical Society of Virginia House of Delegates