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# Medical assistants must not refer to themselves as “nurses”

The following is an updated version of the original piece. “Medical Assistants Must Not Refer to Themselves as ‘Nurses’” was first published in the January/February 2011 issue of CMA Today.

It is unethical, illegal, and a disservice to the medical assisting profession for medical assistants to refer to themselves as “nurses,” “office nurses,” “doctors’ nurses,” or any other generic term that even remotely implies that medical assistants are nurses.

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing *NCSBN Model Act (2012)*<sup>1</sup> includes the following language:

## Article VIII. Violations and Penalties

### Section 1. Violations

No person shall:

- a. Use the title “nurse,” “registered nurse,” “licensed practical/vocational nurse,” “advanced practice registered nurse,” their authorized abbreviations, or any other words, abbreviations, figures, title, sign, card or device that would lead a person to believe the individual is a licensed nurse unless permitted by this Act.<sup>1</sup>

Note that this NCSBN document not only forbids the use of certain titles and abbreviations but also prohibits “any other words, abbreviations, figures, title, sign, card or device that would lead a person to believe the individual is a licensed nurse.” If a title, abbreviation, word, or any other type of designation would cause a reasonable person to conclude that any other type of health

professional is a “nurse” of some sort, there would be a violation of the law.

## State examples

The following excerpts from state nurse practice acts provide examples of how states are addressing this issue:

### Florida

464.016 Violations and penalties.—

Each of the following acts constitutes a misdemeanor of the first degree ...

- a. Using the name or title “Nurse,” ... or any other name or title which implies that a person was licensed or certified as same, unless such person is duly licensed or certified.
- b. Knowingly concealing information relating to violations of this part.<sup>2</sup>

### Illinois

Sec. 50-50. Prohibited acts.

- (a) No person shall:

...

- (6) Use any words, abbreviations, figures, letters, title, sign, card, or device tending to imply that she or he is a registered professional nurse, including the titles or initials, “Nurse,” ... or similar titles or initials with intention of indicat-

ing practice without a valid license as a registered professional nurse;

...

- (b) Any person, including a firm, association, or corporation who violates any provision of this Section shall be guilty of a Class A misdemeanor.<sup>3</sup>

### Indiana

Violations; penalty

Sec. 27. A person who:

...

- (4) uses in connection with the person’s name any designation tending to imply that the person is a registered nurse or a licensed practical nurse unless licensed to practice under this chapter ...;

...

commits a Class B misdemeanor.<sup>4</sup>

### New York

6903. Practice of nursing and use of title “registered professional nurse” or “licensed practical nurse”. ... No person shall use the title “nurse” or any other title or abbreviation that would represent to the public that the person is authorized to practice nursing unless the person is licensed or otherwise authorized under this article.<sup>5</sup>

## Texas

Sec. 301.251. LICENSE REQUIRED.

...

(d) Unless the person holds a license under this chapter, a person may not use, in connection with the person's name:

(1) the title "nurse"; or

(2) any other designation tending to imply that the person is licensed to provide nursing care.<sup>6</sup>

## Concluding statements

As this author has frequently written and spoken about during the last 30 years, it is imperative that medical assistants scrupulously avoid conveying the message that they are nursing personnel or members of

any profession other than medical assisting. Recall the following admonition in "Best Practices for Practices: Protect Your Office by Employing CMAs (AAMA)":

A medical assistant should never be referred to as a "nurse," "office nurse," or "doctor's nurse." In every state this is a violation of the Nurse Practice Act, and can result in fines and penalties. All office personnel should avoid referring to medical assistants as "nurses." If a patient addresses a medical assistant as a nurse, the patient should be corrected politely and pleasantly.<sup>7</sup>

As the medical assisting profession and, especially, the CMA (AAMA) become more prominent in the 21st century health workforce because of the Patient-Centered Medical Home movement, it is more important than ever that medical assistants proudly and unambiguously identify themselves as

members of one of the fastest growing and most important professions in the United States of America. ♦

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## References

1. National Council of State Boards of Nursing. *NCSBN Model Act*. [https://www.ncsbn.org/14\\_Model\\_Act\\_0914.pdf](https://www.ncsbn.org/14_Model_Act_0914.pdf). Published 2012. Accessed March 1, 2019.
2. Fla Stat § 464.016
3. 225 Ill Comp Stat § 65/50-50
4. Ind Code § 25-23-1-27
5. NY Educ Law § 6903
6. Tex Occ Code § 301.251
7. Balasa D. Best practices for practices: protect your office by employing CMAs (AAMA). *CMA Today*. 2006;39(4). <http://aama-ntl.org/docs/default-source/employers/best-practices-for-practices-protect-your-office-by-employing-cmas.pdf?sfvrsn=6>. Updated March 2015. Accessed March 14, 2019.

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— AAMA CEO AND LEGAL COUNSEL DONALD A. BALASA, JD, MBA

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