

Resolution: S-10-05

Subject: Poll for Dual Degree Designation

1. **WHEREAS**, According to a study conducted by the AOA in 2000¹, only 11% of Americans
2. recognize the DO degree designation. Although more may recognize it today, one can
3. reasonably expect that the percentage continues to be in the minority, and
4. **WHEREAS**, Numerous other healthcare providers who are not fully licensed physicians are
5. now designated “doctor,” including NMDs, DNPs, DPTs, DPMs, DCs, and ODs, and
6. **WHEREAS**, Other countries (such as Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom) issue
7. a DO degree that stands for “Diploma in Osteopathy,” and those who are granted this degree
8. are limited manual medicine practitioners instead of fully licensed physicians. These similar
9. degrees are confusing for everyone in the global medical community, and
10. **WHEREAS**, Patients would be better served if the osteopathic degree were universally
11. recognized as legitimate. Some people may refuse treatment, assuming that the DO degree
12. is not a medical degree, and in many countries, people may not be able to legally access
13. treatment by DOs simply because they are not MDs. If just one patient is missed because
14. of these discrepancies, that is one patient too many, and
15. **WHEREAS**, The time, effort, and money spent lobbying for unlimited practice rights in foreign
16. countries² and unambiguous recognition by the media³ and general public⁴ in the United
17. States could be better spent promoting our unique “patient-centered model of care”⁵ if we had a
18. more discernible degree designation, and
19. **WHEREAS**, Osteopathic physicians and students face unwarranted professional
20. discrimination⁶ due to misunderstanding over what it means to be an osteopathic physician.
21. Only about 50 out of 195 countries grant DOs full practice rights.⁷ This fact, among other
22. boundaries, separates us needlessly from MDs, regardless of the AOA’s sincere attempts to
23. eliminate such barriers, and
24. **WHEREAS**, Osteopathic physicians practice traditional medicine (like MDs), with the
25. additional valuable resource of osteopathic manipulative treatment and emphasis on important
26. osteopathic tenets⁸ (which have also become accepted by many in the allopathic medical
27. community)⁹ rather than pure osteopathy, meaning “disease of the bones,” as the Doctor of
28. Osteopathic Medicine degree suggests, and
29. **WHEREAS**, The title “Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine” may mislead the public because it

30. suggests that all DOs subspecialize in treating bone diseases as opposed to treating the whole

31. patient, which is our true goal, and

32. **WHEREAS**, The specifically osteopathic component of our education is approximately

33. equivalent to the training of those who hold a Diploma in Osteopathy degree in other

34. countries,¹⁰ and

35. **WHEREAS**, Maintaining “DO” in our degree designation would respect our legacy while

36. limiting confusion for those who do recognize the DO degree. Most Americans would

37. probably not notice if the “D” were changed from “Doctor” to “Diploma” and people in the

38. international community would already be familiar with the Diploma in Osteopathy degree, and

39. **WHEREAS**, The addition of the universally recognizable MD degree to our credentials

40. would significantly improve our ability to disseminate the osteopathic philosophy worldwide,

41. especially among allopathic institutions, thereby reaffirming the original DO degree (Diplomate

42. of Osteopathy, as created by A.T. Still)¹¹ and securing its continued existence and use, and

43. **WHEREAS**, Despite years of the AOA advocating for semantic clarity, there is still confusion

44. over whether we are Doctors of Osteopathic Medicine or Doctors of Osteopathy,¹² and calling

45. ourselves “Doctor of Medicine, Diplomate of Osteopathy” would resolve this linguistic

46. conundrum, and

47. **WHEREAS**, A dual MD, DO, Doctor of Medicine, Diploma in Osteopathy degree would

48. properly convey that osteopathic physicians not only possess similar medical training to our

49. allopathic counterparts, but also have the additional knowledge of osteopathic principles and

50. practice¹³ and

51. **WHEREAS**, The implementation of such a dual degree would, by default, discourage any

52. COMs from choosing to offer separate MD-granting pathways at the expense of the osteopathic

53. community¹⁴, and

54. **WHEREAS**, A dual MD, DO degree could prevent inappropriate associations between

55. osteopathic physicians and limited-practice professionals¹⁵ by making it easier for the AOA to

56. educate the MD-conscious public about the many benefits of osteopathic principles and practice,

57. thereby giving all osteopathic physicians the universal recognition that they rightfully deserve, and

58. **WHEREAS**, With the aid of the internet, polling the osteopathic community on this issue would

59. be relatively straightforward and cost-effective, and

60. **WHEREAS**, Conducting a poll regarding degree designation possibilities would help the AOA

61. determine what the majority of osteopathic physicians and students think about degree change,

62. allowing the AOA to make an informed decision that brings closure to this recurring issue; now,

63. therefore, be it

64. **RESOLVED**, That within one year of this resolution's passing, SOMA will assist the AOA in
65. conducting a poll of osteopathic medical students and physicians who are AOA members about
66. keeping the current DO degree or changing it to the proposed Doctor of Medicine, Diplomate of
67. Osteopathy (MD, DO) dual degree, and be it further

68. **RESOLVED**, That a committee consisting of both osteopathic medical students and physicians
69. will be established to oversee and evaluate the polling process and to investigate the logistics of
70. degree change, and be it further

71. **RESOLVED**, That if this resolution is affirmed by SOMA but not the AOA, then the
72. aforementioned committee will conduct a poll within SOMA and will report the results of that poll
73. to the AOA, and be it further

74. **RESOLVED**, That if a simple majority of osteopathic physicians and/or students vote to change
75. the degree to MD, DO, then SOMA will implore the AOA to officially recommend to all COMs
76. that the degree be changed, and will support and facilitate the process of changing the degree in an
77. efficient manner, and be it further

78. **RESOLVED**, That current DOs and OMSs may opt to either maintain the present DO degree or
79. accept the new MD, DO degree.

Submitted by:



Action taken:

Date: 2 Apr 2010

Effective period: Ongoing

References:

1. Corry, C. "The unknown healers." AllBusiness.com. 4 Feb 2000. <http://www.allbusiness.com/north-america/united-states-new-york/891988-1.html> Accessed on 3 Nov 09.
2. "AOA international licensure summary." Do-online.org. 2009. https://portal.do-online.org/portal/server.pt?open=512&objID=709&&activetab=TabCTRL_DropDownTabsMandatoryTABS4&mode=2&in_hi_userid=984567&cached=true&in_hi_userid=1027509 Accessed 10 Dec 09.
3. "Advocacy tips and templates." Do-online.org. 2009. <https://portal.do-online.org/portal/server.pt?open=512&objID=596&PageID=1024404&cached=true&mode=2&userID=1023654> Accessed 10 Dec 09.
4. "What is a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.)." AOA. 2010. http://www.osteopathic.org/index.cfm?PageID=ado_whatis Accessed 23 Jan 10.