

## APPROPRIATE CREDENTIAL USE/TITLE PROTECTION FOR NURSES WITH ADVANCED DEGREES

### Description

The designation “doctor” is commonly used to acknowledge completion of a terminal degree in many professional disciplines. This title in the discipline of nursing is central to establishing collegial, collaborative relationships with all members of the healthcare team by recognizing a higher educational level that nurses bring to the arena. However, the use of the term “doctor” to refer to nurses has been discouraged because there is a potential for role confusion when doctorally prepared nurses are addressed as “doctor” in the practice setting.<sup>1</sup>

### ENA Position

It is the position of the Emergency Nurses Association that:

1. Nurses are entitled to have their educational degrees recognized and acknowledged in the same manner as other professions.
2. The proper title protection and use of accurate credentials is appropriate in the clinical setting.
3. When being addressed or introduced as doctor in the clinical environment, it is responsible practice for all healthcare providers to clarify their professional role.
4. Patients, families and the general public have a right and expectation to be informed regarding the credentials of their caregivers, including the use of the title “doctor”.

### Background

Prior to the beginning of the Doctor of Nursing Practice Degree (DNP), nurses primarily earned research doctoral degrees. Widely used in academia, these nurses serve as researchers and university professors. Nurses who were involved in direct patient care were not addressed as doctor, although they may have earned a doctoral degree.<sup>2</sup> As with any evolving profession, nursing now includes doctoral preparation that is specific to the profession of nursing.

In 2004, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing endorsed a position statement calling for the practice doctorate, known as the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), as one of the terminal practice degrees for nurses.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, in 2015 the title Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) will be used as the accreditation standard for advanced practice nurses in accordance with the American Association of College of Nursing.<sup>3</sup> A recent national agenda called for all nurses to be utilized to the highest level of training and education.<sup>4</sup>

The ability of nurses to be addressed using earned credentials in all settings lends credibility to nurses' knowledge base, gives credence to the skilled abilities of nurses and allows the public to be knowledgeable regarding their caregivers.

## References

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2. Health Careers Network. (2012). *Why nurses should not be called doctor.* Retrieved from [www.healthcareers.com/article/why-nurses-should-not-be-called-doctor/169687](http://www.healthcareers.com/article/why-nurses-should-not-be-called-doctor/169687)
3. American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2004, October). *AACN position statement on the practice doctorate in nursing.* Retrieved from <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/publications/position/DNPpositionstatement.pdf>
4. Institute of Medicine. (2010). *The future of nursing: Leading change, advancing health.* Retrieved from <http://iom.edu/report/2010/the-future-of-nursing-leading-change-advancing-health.aspx>.

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