



American Association of Physicists in Medicine

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Office of the President

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Senator Tom Harkin
Chairman, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Mike Enzi
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
379A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: *Consistency, Accuracy, Responsibility and Excellence in Medical Imaging and Radiation Therapy Act of 2012*, Senate Bill No. XX

Dear Senators Harkin and Enzi:

The American Association of Physicists in Medicine (AAPM) appreciates your continued commitment to passing the CARE legislation. AAPM is a scientific and professional organization, founded in 1958, composed of nearly 7,800 scientists whose clinical practice is dedicated to ensuring accuracy, safety and quality in the use of radiation in medical procedures such as medical imaging and radiation therapy. We are generally known as medical physicists and are uniquely positioned across medical specialties due to our responsibility to connect the physician to the patient through the use of radiation producing technology in both diagnosing and treating people. The responsibility of the medical physicist is to assure that the radiation prescribed in imaging and radiation therapy is delivered accurately and safely.

AAPM has devoted a substantial part of its energy to the creation and recognition of a position known as Qualified Medical Physicist, or QMP. These physicists have education in the principles of physics, radiobiology, human anatomy, physiology and oncology through a graduate degree, as well as clinical training in the applications of radiation physics to medicine, such as the technologies of medical imaging and treatment delivery, radiation dose planning and measurement, as well as safety analysis and quality control methods. Following this, an individual demonstrates competence in his/her discipline by obtaining board certification. Certification is a rigorous, multi-year process that requires considerable supervised clinical experience as well as passage of written and oral examinations. The AAPM recognizes a Qualified Medical Physicist for the purpose of providing clinical medical physics services, as an individual who is board-certified in the appropriate medical subfield and has documented continuing education.

Unfortunately, there is no consistent national recognition of the Qualified Medical Physicist credential and no consistent minimum requirement for graduate education or board certification of medical physicists. The states vary widely in their requirements. It is possible in some states for individuals without appropriate qualifications to perform as medical physicists.

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The tasks performed by medical physicists are quite technical and require years of study and practice to be properly executed. For instance, in diagnostic imaging medical physicists evaluate the imaging capabilities of the equipment to be used and develop techniques to optimize the image quality while minimizing the risk to the patient. In radiation oncology, the medical physicist works directly with the physician in developing the treatment techniques to be used to implement the physician's prescription, measure patient-specific doses in order to verify the accuracy of patient treatments and perform tests to ensure the proper operation of the equipment. In both areas the medical physicist helps to ensure compliance with existing state and federal regulations.

Many of the tasks performed by a medical physicist apply to all patients undergoing imaging or treatment. While major mistakes may make the news, smaller unseen mistakes or poor techniques may never be known or reported – the final result being a missed diagnosis or a less than adequate treatment. The CARE bill will guarantee consistent formal education, training and experience for each medical physicist, giving the public a reasonable assurance that the care they receive, or perhaps the care of a loved one in a different state, will be given by a well educated, trained and experienced individual.

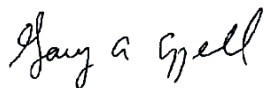
In conclusion, creating the requirement for these standards is critical in order to provide an assurance to the general public that the imaging and radiation therapy provided to them will be performed by individuals who have attained at least an industry standard minimum level of formal education, training, and experience resulting in a quality procedure. In addition these standards should help lower the cost associated with these procedures.

We must strive for nationally consistent recognition of the Qualified Medical Physicist and equivalent competency for all medical radiation team members. With your guidance and support, the CARE bill can accomplish all of these goals and we request that the Senate take immediate action on the CARE bill. Millions of American patients we treat each year truly appreciate your efforts to create a patient-focused and quality-focused health care system through the introduction of the CARE bill.

We remain hopeful that during this Congress the House and Senate will enact the CARE bill and that millions of American patients will benefit from the enhanced quality of medical imaging examinations and increased efficacy of therapeutic treatments through the establishment of technical personnel standards.

If you would like to discuss this further, please contact Lynne Fairbent, AAPM's Manager of Legislative and Regulatory Affairs at 3012093364 or email: lynne@aapm.org or myself.

Sincerely,



Gary A. Ezzell, Ph.D., FAAPM