

USE OF THE TITLE “DOCTOR”

Use of the title “Doctor” is restricted in the *Regulated Health Professions Act*. However, under certain conditions, appropriately qualified members are permitted to refer to their academic qualifications when they are providing or offering to provide health care to individuals.

BACKGROUND

The *Regulated Health Professions Act* restricts the use of the title “Doctor”. Except as permitted in the regulations under the Act, no person is entitled to use the title “Doctor”, a variation or abbreviation or an equivalent in another language in the course of providing or offering to provide in Ontario health care to individuals, unless they are members of the College of Chiropractors of Ontario, the College of Optometrists of Ontario, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the College of Psychologists of Ontario or the Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario. The purpose of this prohibition is to avoid confusion among health care consumers.

NOTE: The restrictions on the use of the title “doctor” apply only in the course of providing or offering to provide health care. Members with doctoral degrees may use the title “doctor” in academic, research and other settings.

Members of this College, who obtain PhDs, or AuDs or other doctorates often inquire as to whether they are entitled to set out their qualifications on business cards, letterheads and reports in the course of providing or offering to provide health care. The purpose of this Position Statement is to provide guidance to members as to the proper description of their academic qualifications when in the course of providing or offering to provide health care in Ontario.

Some members of the College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario have successfully completed the requirements of university doctoral – degree programs that permit them to use the word “Doctor”, or an abbreviation thereof. For example, some members have obtained a “Doctorate of Audiology”, or a PhD in speech-language pathology, or a Doctor of Science or Doctor of Arts in communication disorders. These titles describe their academic achievements and are not designators of professional competence.

A simple application of the RHPA prohibition against using the word “Doctor” or an abbreviation thereof, suggests that members are precluded from setting out their qualifications. However, there is a judicial authority in support of the proposition that members can place after their names their degrees, followed by

the word “Audiologist” or “Speech-Language Pathologist”, provided that they are registered members of the College.

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GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Members are at liberty to refer to their formal training or degrees, as well as the fact that they are either audiologists or speech-language pathologists. However, because it is possible to set out academic credentials without referring to oneself as “Dr. X”, members should be mindful of the general prohibition against use of the title “Doctor”. As the restriction on use of the title “Doctor” is to prevent confusion among health care consumers, members must take particular precautions when referring to themselves in both public and private documentation. Members must be equally careful to ensure that their staff and/or colleagues do not refer to them as “Dr. X”, whether in the presence of patients/clients or not.

Assuming that members are properly qualified, members with a “Doctorate of Audiology”, or “AuD”, may describe themselves as, for example:

“John Doe, Doctor of Audiology,
Audiologist”

This description sets out the member’s academic qualifications, without referring to themselves as “Dr. Doe”, which is prohibited. The same is true with respect to Speech-Language Pathology degrees and practitioners. Members should always ensure that they set out their academic qualifications accurately.

CONCLUSION

Members must never mislead the public as to their qualifications. More specifically, members are precluded from calling themselves “Dr. Doe”, regardless of their qualifications, when they are providing or are offering to provide health care in Ontario.

At the same time, members are not precluded from accurately setting out their academic qualifications as described above.

RESOURCES

Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991, S.O. 1991 c. 18, s. 33.

College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists (1996). *Code of Ethics*.

Regina v. Ladelfa, [1970] 3 O.R. 232 (Co. Ct.), affirmed [1971] 1 O.R. 680 (C.A.).

Re College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario and Larsen, [1987] 45 D.L.R. (4th) 700 (H.C.J.).