

Arizona Medical Board



The first medical doctors arrived in the Arizona Territory in the late 1800s with the U.S. Cavalry. At the time, individuals could open a practice regardless of their formal medical training or practical experience. By the early 1890s, concern was growing about the training and qualifications of many in the territory who were claiming to be physicians and treating patients.

In 1897, 15 years before Arizona became a state, the Arizona Territorial Legislature passed a law requiring physicians to register with the territory, but did not provide a mechanism for registration. Acting on the advice of the Arizona Medical Association, lawmakers established the Arizona State Board of Medical Examiners in 1903 and gave it the authority to issue medical licenses to qualified physicians. The board consisted of five physician members appointed by the governor. Almost from the beginning, the board tested applicants for licensure, denying licenses even to medical school graduates who failed to pass a "satisfactory examination."

Many physicians practicing in the territory at this time were "grandfathered" in by the law of 1897 and awarded licenses by the board. This included "physicians" who had practiced for decades but had no formal training. The fee for the first Arizona medical licenses was \$2. Licensee names, ages, medical training and professional histories were handwritten into the Great Register -- a large volume that, when opened, takes up the surface of a desk. Entries also indicated whether a physician had "left the territory" or retired or whether a license was revoked. Many entries indicated the date of the physician's death.

The Arizona State Board of Medical Examiners licensed homeopathic and "eclectic" physicians as well as allopathic and osteopathic physicians. Eclectic physicians practiced medicine with a philosophy of "alignment of nature." They were early opponents of bleeding techniques, chemical purging and the use of mercury compounds common among conventional doctors at the time. The movement peaked in the 1880s and 1890s, but it wasn't until 1939 that the last U.S. eclectic medical school closed.

The Arizona Medical Practice Act evolved over time. Early board meeting minutes show members revoked licenses for performing abortions, which were illegal at the time, attempting to bribe a judge, and for habitual intemperance involving alcohol or drugs. In the 1980s, the state legislature expanded the board to 12 members, including four non-physicians. In 2002, the legislature changed the agency's name to the Arizona Medical Board. [Ram R. Krishna, M.D.](#), currently serves on the FSMB Board of Directors as a Director-at-Large.