

Oklahoma Medical Board



Before gaining statehood in 1907, Oklahoma consisted of Oklahoma Territory and Indian Territory. Neither had laws regulating and licensing physicians although both had medical associations. The Oklahoma Territory board of health licensed physicians using the honor system and 445 physicians were registered by 1894.

At the University of [Oklahoma Western History Collections](#), oral histories of pioneer physicians reveal that most pioneer doctors were hard working, dedicated and practiced honestly and ethically, although few had any professional training. Most are believed to have gained practical knowledge by serving apprenticeships. The histories include mentions of quacks who earned the pejorative title through dishonesty rather than incompetence.

The United States amalgamated the two territories into the state of Oklahoma and the first statutes addressing the practice of medicine were passed one year later in 1908. However, medical regulation laws were enacted on a piecemeal basis and were often unenforceable. In 1923, a comprehensive Medical Practice Act was passed that created a State Board of Medical Examiners, prescribed its duties and regulated the practice of medicine and surgery and the "vending" of medicines in Oklahoma. Unprofessional conduct was given 10 definitions, including advertising in any manner, the curing of venereal diseases, the restoration of lost manhood, the treatment and curing of private diseases peculiar to men and women, and others.

Applicants for licensure at that time were examined in anatomy, physiology, hygiene, chemistry, surgery, obstetrics, gynecology, bacteriology, pathology, medical jurisprudence, material medica (study of medicinal drugs) and practice. Members of the board divvied up subject areas among themselves and wrote questions out in longhand.

Following World War II, the medical board voted to hire a combination attorney and legislative liaison. At this time, board members took turns conducting investigations. One of the key leaders of the board during that era was [James Darrah Osborn](#), M.D. Dr. Osborn served as the secretary of the board from 1935 till his untimely death in February 1947. Dr. Osborn was President-elect of the Federation of State Medical Boards and en route to the FSMB annual meeting to assume that office when he was killed in a railway accident. By 1973, the [Oklahoma Medical Board](#) had full-time investigators. Under the direction of board member Dr. Harry Tate, an Oklahoma City neurosurgeon, the board mandated that all complaints about physicians should be in writing and signed, and physicians appearing before the board were encouraged to hire attorneys.

During the 1980s under the guidance of Executive Director Carole Smith, the board's reputation for efficiency and fairness was established. Lawmakers extended its oversight responsibilities to athletic trainers, dieticians, occupational therapists and electrologists.

In 1994, the Medical Practice Act was reviewed and updated to remove outdated, inappropriate language. A listing of 43 types of unprofessional conduct was included in response to a judicial directive that discipline could only be meted out for specific violations. Since then, five more definitions of unprofessional conduct have been adopted into the act.