

Washington Medical Quality Assurance Commission



The territorial legislature in Washington passed a Medical Practice Act in 1881, eight years before Washington became a state. The Washington Territorial Governor at the time was William Newell, M.D., who entered politics after many years of medical practice, including serving as Abraham Lincoln's private physician. As governor of Washington Territory, Dr. Newell was a supporter of progressive legislation regarding public health and vital statistics as well as laws that established medical examining boards to license physicians, surgeons and pharmacies. When Dr. Newell's term of office expired, he became closely involved with efforts to upgrade the quality of Washington's practitioners and served on the Washington State Medical Examining Board in the 1890s.

On July 4, 1889, 75 citizens including 43 Republicans, 29 Democrats, and three Independents met in Olympia to draft the new Washington State constitution. Among the delegates was a group of physicians who worked diligently for effective medical legislation for the new state. Article XX of the constitution – requiring a board of health, bureau of vital statistics and regulations concerning medicine, surgery and pharmacy – passed on Aug. 12, 1889, with no dissenting votes and no amendments. The Washington State Medical Society, in an official resolution, commended the committee for its diligence, noting, "The State of Washington alone possesses a constitutional clause requiring medical legislation."

The 1890 Medical Practice Act, which was a revision of the territorial legislation of 1881, created a nine-member Board of Examiners to determine applicant competency by administering a scientific and practical exam in anatomy and physiology. Violation of the act brought a \$50 to \$100 fine or 10 to 90 days in jail. In 1894, only 12 out of 34 applicants passed the exam, despite possessing diplomas from reputable medical colleges.

The law was amended in 1901 to require proof of graduation from an authorized college with a three-year course in medicine. In 1905, the law was amended to require a four-year education. In 1919, practitioners were required to have a diploma from a school approved by the Association of American Medical Colleges and the AMA Council on Medical Education and Hospital, and show evidence of a one-year internship in a 25-bed hospital that included six weeks of maternity service.

In 1955, the Medical Disciplinary Board was established and located within the Department of Licensing along with the Board of Examiners. In 1971, physician assistants were licensed for the first time. The Medical Disciplinary Board and the Board of Medical Examiners were moved in 1989 to the newly created Department of Health. Five years later, the legislature abolished both medical boards and created the [Washington Medical Quality Assurance Commission](#) with the authority to license and discipline allopathic physicians and physician assistants.

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