



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Senator Griffo's Weekly Column #21: Putting More Truth in Advertising

JOSEPH A. GRIFFO May 22, 2014

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Here's a straightforward, but deceptively hard question: You're deciding between two doctors for your upcoming heart surgery. One has advertised as being "board certified" by the American Academy of Cardiology. The other, you learn, was certified by the American College of Cardiology. Which one would you trust with the scalpel? (The answer is at the end of this column.)

If you're hemming and hawing about your answer, take comfort. You are not alone. It is so easy to get confused about the qualifications of medical professionals – and your life may depend on it.

I believe the medical profession needs more truth in its advertising. I've introduced a bill that would protect the patient by implementing four small changes.

First, you've got to give your qualifications when you advertise your services. It's great that you're board certified. Tell us which board. After all, you'd want to know if that medical professional with a laser pointed at your eye is certified in ophthalmology and not, say, plastic surgery. Right?

Second, that board has got to be legitimate. It's got to be a member of an association that requires postgraduate training, certification and examination – not one that extorts money in exchange for some impressive sounding, but ultimately worthless, combination of letters.

Third, you should be able to check out these credentials yourself. We want those practicing medicine to wear photo IDs that say their names, the type of license and the expiration date of their license. They'll also have to post the same information on a wall of their office, in public view.

Finally, we're going to add penalties for those that continue to cheat the system.

Legitimate medical professionals actually want this legislation. It ensures transparency, ensures patient care and safety and reduces confusion among those seeking medical attention. My bill has gotten great support from the American Medical Society and the Medical Society of New York, and associations representing dermatologists, ophthalmologists, plastic surgeons, anesthesiologists and specialty physicians. I was even awarded the "Patient Safety Hero Award" by the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery Association for my advocacy on this bill.

I believe the Senate will soon vote to approve this bill and bring it one step closer to law. And it means the "cardiologist" who got his or her papers from the American Academy of Cardiology, which certifies basically anybody for \$300, won't be able to advertise anymore and will likely be out of business soon.