

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Use of the Terms Client and Provider

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 2020

Approved by the Assembly, November 2020

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

The terms “provider” and “client” have been inaccurately used to describe the patient-physician relationship. The term “provider”, when used to refer to health care professionals, can imply that all health care professionals’ training and expertise is interchangeable. This bureaucratic term can confuse persons who are seeking the care of a physician. It can also imply that the relationship between a physician and a patient is commercial in nature. Likewise, the term “client” has negative implications in that it places emphasis on the commercial, rather than medical, nature of the patient-physician relationship. The American Medical Association and the American Academy of Family Physicians have enacted polices to avoid use of the term “provider.”

APA Position:

- 1. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) shall discontinue use of the terms “provider” and “client” in all official communications, including but not limited to policies, statements, press releases, social media posts, official letters, contracts, advertisements, its web site, and official speeches.**
- 2. The APA recognizes that the terms “client” and “provider” are commonly used by government agencies and scientific journals. When reporting or commenting on materials from such sources, APA, inclusive of its publication *Psychiatric News*, shall limit use of those terms to the extent possible. APA is encouraged to attribute use of such terms to the original source material and to use more appropriate terms whenever possible.**

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