FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 13, 2013

THE FOLLOWING REPRESENTS A POSITION STATEMENT BY THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF PATHOLOGISTS’ ASSISTANTS REGARDING THE USE OF “DOCTORATE OF ANATOMIC PATHOLOGY” OR ANY OTHER TITLE WHICH WOULD SERVE TO COMPETE WITH THE IDENTITY OF BOARD CERTIFIED ANATOMIC PATHOLOGISTS AND CLINICAL PATHOLOGISTS.

1. The pathologists’ assistant training programs are now required to confer a master’s degree (recently changed to align all programs) and undergo a rigorous initial accreditation process, followed by re-accreditation inspections. We are proud of our partnership with the National Accrediting Agency for Clinical Laboratory Sciences (NAACLS) which oversees the accreditation process, insuring students a high-quality educational experience.

2. Graduates of the NAACLS accredited pathologists’ assistant training programs are eligible to sit for the pathologists’ assistant certification exam. The certification exam is administered by another valued partner of the AAPA – the American Society for Clinical Pathology Board of Certification (ASCP BOC). Passing the pathologists’ assistant certification exam provides validation of the individual’s training and serves to insure that the practitioner, identified by the title protected credentialing suffix PA(ASCP), is prepared to succeed in the workforce and contribute to the care of patients.

3. Once an individual passes the ASCP BOC pathologists’ assistant certification examination, the certified practitioner is required to complete 45 units of accredited continuing medical education every three years in order to maintain certification as a pathologists’ assistant. These individuals are distinguished by the addition of “cm” to the title protected credentialing suffix: PA(ASCP)cm.

4. At present, there are 1,700 certified pathologists’ assistants in the United States of America, and these individuals have been supporting pathologists for over 40 years. Thus, the educational and certification process for pathologists’ assistants is time-tested and successful. However, while the AAPA sees no need for additional degrees to create additional competencies for pathologists’ assistants, we will not oppose the right of any individual to seek additional educational degrees as an adjunct to the pathologists’ assistant education and certification process.

5. However, the AAPA is ardently opposed, to the use of the title “doctorate of anatomic pathology,” or any other title which would serve to compete with the identity of board certified anatomic pathologists and clinical pathologists.

   A. It is the unanimous opinion of the AAPA Board of Trustees, that a “doctor of anatomic pathology” is a physician practicing in the medical specialty of pathology, defined as an individual who has earned a doctor of medicine, or doctor of osteopathic medicine degree, completed required residency, passed the board certification exam administered by the American Board of Pathology, and obtained a license by the applicable state / regulatory body to practice medicine as a pathologist.

   B. Consequently, it is the unanimous opinion of the AAPA Board of Trustees that the title “doctorate of anatomic pathology” is an inappropriate degree title. The title may serve to confuse patients, medical institutions, healthcare providers, and regulators about the clinical / medical competencies of these individuals.

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The American Association of Pathologists’ Assistants, incorporated in 1972, is a not-for-profit, volunteer organization, dedicated to furthering the pathologists’ assistant profession by providing its members with targeted CME, networking, professional support, and advocacy. The AAPA has over 1500 certified and certification exam eligible pathologists' assistant members who have met the highest standards for education and training in surgical and autopsy pathology, ensuring that pathology laboratories are meeting the standards of accreditation, licensing, and the expectations of their medical staff.

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