

Position Statement

American Osteopathic Academy of Orthopedics (AOAO) Against Ageism and in Support of Restraint of Trade Protections

The American Osteopathic Academy of Orthopedics (AOAO) affirms its commitment to equitable, ethical, and patient-centered musculoskeletal care. As an organization grounded in osteopathic principles and lifelong professional development, the AOAO opposes age-based discrimination in all forms and supports fair competition standards that protect both physicians and the patients they serve.

1. Opposition to Ageism in Orthopedic Practice

The AOAO recognizes that ageism, whether directed toward patients or physicians, undermines quality of care, professional dignity, and access to treatment. Clinical decisions must be guided by evidence, functional status, and individual patient goals rather than chronological age alone. Similarly, orthopedic surgeons should be evaluated based on competence, ongoing education, and outcomes, not age-based assumptions.

The AOAO therefore:

- Advocates for clinical policies that prioritize individualized assessment over age thresholds.
- Supports inclusive training, hiring, and credentialing practices that promote diversity across all career stages.
- Encourages continuing medical education and peer review processes that ensure patient safety while respecting experienced physicians' contributions to the profession.

2. Support for Ethical Restraint of Trade Principles

The AOAO acknowledges that reasonable restraint of trade policies, when ethically structured and legally compliant, may help preserve continuity of care, protect practice investments, and sustain community access to orthopedic services. However, such measures must balance organizational interests with physician autonomy and patient choice.

The AOAO supports:

- Transparent, fair, and time-limited non-compete or restrictive covenants that do not create barriers to patient access or physician mobility.
- Contractual standards that protect early-career and transitioning physicians from exploitative limitations.
- Collaboration with policymakers and professional societies to ensure that regulations governing restraint of trade promote competition, innovation, and patient welfare.

3. Commitment to Patient-Centered Outcomes

Central to osteopathic orthopedic practice is the belief that healthcare systems should foster collaboration, integrity, and respect. Policies addressing ageism and restraint of

trade must ultimately enhance patient access, support physician well-being, and uphold the highest standards of musculoskeletal care.

Conclusion

The AOA stands against discrimination based on age and endorses balanced approaches to restraint of trade that protect patients, physicians, and the integrity of the orthopedic profession. Through education, advocacy, and ethical leadership, the Academy will continue to promote fairness, inclusivity, and excellence in osteopathic orthopedic medicine.