Getting Licensed

STATE MEDICAL BOARDS, HOSPITAL PRIVILEGES, AND MANAGED CARE CONTRACTS

It is very important to start as early as possible to get licensure, hospital privileges, and insurance contracts in order. Usually each step in this process requires that the previous step has been completed. Most of these applications require the same basic information. Gather this information ahead of time and keep it handy as you start receiving your applications. Here is a list of the information to gather ahead of time:

1) Certified copy of medical school diploma and contact info for your medical school

2) Certified copies of post-graduate training certificates (internship, residency, and fellowship) and contact information for the program director from each program

3) A timeline of your education, training, and employment since starting medical school (you may have to account for gaps in the timeline)

4) Copies of prior state medical licenses

5) Physician profile report from the AMA or AOA

6) Copies of examination scores (USMLE, FLEX, NBME, NBOME)

7) Copies of CME (may not be needed if within two years of completing training)

Here is a summary of each step and the associated minimum time requirements:

1. State Medical License
   - The average processing time is 8 to 12 weeks—this varies by state and may take up to 6 months.

   - State Board websites can be accessed at http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/2645.html. Requirements differ by state. Some state medical boards meet monthly and you have to wait until the next board meeting. Other state boards meet less often (e.g., quarterly) but will grant a temporary license if your application package is complete.

   - At first contact with a Board, ask for a copy of the requirements and the average processing time. This information also can often be found on the Board website.

   - At first contact, provide the Board with a copy of your curriculum vitae.

   - Be up front with unfavorable information.

   - Personally follow-up with information holders (medical school, training programs, etc.) to verify credentials faster.
• Be pleasant and patient.

2. State and Federal DEA

• State medical and controlled substances licenses are required to apply for a federal controlled substances license. The state controlled substance license is usually part of your state medical license.

• The processing time for the federal DEA license is 4-6 weeks.

• The federal DEA website can be accessed at http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/index.html.

• The following information is needed to complete the federal DEA application:
  o Tax ID number and/or Social Security Number
  o State controlled substance registration information
  o State medical license information
  o Credit card

3. Hospital Credentialing and Privileges

Let’s start with some basic definitions provided in this excerpt from the New England Journal of Medicine (Kristeller 1995):

Credentialing is the formal recognition of professional and technical competence. The process has two distinct elements: it establishes what information is necessary to confirm professional and technical competence, including mechanisms for the verification of the information received by the hospital, and it evaluates the information received with reference to an applicant. The delineation of clinical privileges is the process whereby the medical staff evaluates and recommends that an individual practitioner be allowed to provide specific patient care services in the institution. A clinical privilege is a specific grant or permission by a hospital for an individual practitioner to perform diagnostic or therapeutic procedures or other patient care services within well-defined limits.

This topic is difficult to summarize with general advice. Requirements will differ with each hospital, because the medical staff for each hospital is responsible for this process. Once you have accepted a job, contact the hospitals you will most likely be working with to learn the specific requirements. This process can take three to six months and is often the most time-consuming of the above tasks. Therefore, it is a good idea to send in applications while license applications are in process, even though privileges will not be granted until licensure is complete.

4. Insurance Carriers

• To be credentialed with a health plan, you must have admitting privileges at a hospital.
• Once you have admitting privileges at a hospital, it can take six to eight months to be fully credentialed with health plans. You need to contact each health plan individually.

• Medicare is for people age 65 or older, people under age 65 with certain disabilities, and people of all ages with end-stage renal disease. Medicare applications take at least 60 days; however, claims are usually honored according to the start-of-practice date. More information can be found at http://www.cms.hhs.gov/MedicareProviderSupEnroll

• Medicaid/state-run welfare programs are often important insurance plans in which to participate. In some states, private insurance companies will inquire into the applicant’s Medicaid participation status prior to accepting an application.

Transitioning into Practice

Get Patients to See

• Get on hospital websites (as soon as privileges approved, provide photo) and the website of your new practice
• Letters to referring providers (4-6 weeks before start)
  • Enclose business cards and photo
• Advertise in local papers/websites (2-4 weeks before start)
• Visit offices of referring providers (2 weeks before start and after starting)
  • Have business cards printed and plan to distribute to the providers, managers, and receptionists.

Be Prepared to See Patients

• Carefully and realistically make a schedule
  • Open to patients before starting practice
• Provide for at least 3 exam rooms
• Dedicated staff
• Prepare handouts/forms
• Familiarize yourself with the new practice's EMR, dictation system, and billing