Credentialing and Privileging Advanced Practice Providers

Reducing Risk Through Due Diligence

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Credentialing and privileging — the processes by which a healthcare organization or practice assesses and confirms the qualifications of a practitioner and authorizes the provision of specific services — ensure that individuals who are providing care are qualified to do so.

Although a discussion about credentialing and privileging may seem yawn-worthy, these processes are paramount to patient safety and risk reduction. For advanced practice providers (APPs) — whose backgrounds, scopes of practice, and training may vary significantly — credentialing and privileging play an important role in validating competency and determining appropriate practice boundaries.

What You Don’t Know Can Hurt You

One of the largest malpractice awards in U.S. history involved negligent credentialing of an APP. At the heart of the case was an unlicensed physician assistant (PA) who was working in an emergency department.

The supervising physician, who misdiagnosed a stroke based on findings from the PA (and who did not do his own patient exam and history), was unaware that the provider was unlicensed — as was the medical group that employed both practitioners.

The consequences of the negligent credentialing and other missteps in this case were profound. The patient suffered from paralysis and mental disabilities as a result of the delayed diagnosis, and the jury awarded a settlement totaling more than $200 million, including $100 million in punitive damages.

This case underscores, in dramatic fashion, the necessity of verifying all healthcare providers’ qualifications, including those of APPs. Failure to properly credential providers can increase liability exposure and may result in allegations of negligent hiring.

* Examples of advanced practice providers include physician assistants, nurse practitioners, certified registered nurse anesthetists, and advanced dental therapists.
Exercising Due Diligence

When APPs to the team, healthcare organizations and practices should consider the following tenets of a sound credentialing and privileging approach:5,6,7

- The credentialing process for APPs should be consistent with the process used for other providers in the practice. The approach should be comprehensive and criteria based.
- Credentialing should be completed prior to the privileging process and before the APP is allowed to provide patient care services.
- As part of credentialing, it is recommended that practices:
  - Verify that the APP graduated from an accredited program, and review the provider’s educational transcripts.
  - Confirm that the APP has an active license in the state, and verify any professional certification.
  - Verify past experience and training, including checking with professional references.
  - Query the National Practitioner Data Bank.
  - Complete a criminal background check.
- Collaborative agreements (if applicable) should be reviewed as part of the credentialing process, and they should be included in the APP’s credential file.
- Healthcare organizations and practices should establish a thorough privileging process to authorize APPs’ scopes of practice.
- Any privileges granted to a provider should be consistent with state regulations related to scope of practice and supervision.
- Privileging should occur in a timely manner following the completion of credentialing.
- As part of privileging, it is recommended that practices:
  - Review the APP’s qualifications.
  - Determine which privileges have been requested and which will be granted.
  - Clearly note the conditions or limitations of the APP’s scope of practice.
  - Define the process for ongoing assessment of competency and quality review.
• Practices should have a process in place for periodic review and updating of APPs’ credentials and privileges. The recredentialing process should take into account:
  o Skill and knowledge acquired over time that may alter the provider’s scope of practice.
  o The amount of continuing education (CE) required to maintain a license, which will vary based on the type of APP and state regulations.
  o The types of CE completed, including the format and whether the content is rigorous.
  o Proficiency with any new technologies or diagnostic/treatment methods.

Note: The suggestions listed are general risk management strategies. Healthcare organizations’ policies and processes for credentialing and privileging should adhere to all relevant state regulations.

Learn More
For more information about credentialing and privileging, see MedPro Group’s Credentialing and Privileging guideline or contact your MedPro Group patient safety and risk consultant.
Endnotes


3 Ibid.


6 Crane, Malpractice risks.


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