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July 2011

ARRA Licensure Portability Grant Program Update

1) Background

In March 2010, the Health Resources and Services Administration of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded a \$498,000 grant to what is now the Wisconsin Department of Safety and Professional Services. The grant is funding a Licensure Portability Grant Program that will end in February 2012. The purpose of the Grant Program is to create a multi-state Task Force that will, through a collaborative process, implement an interstate licensure portability program that reduces and eliminates statutory and regulatory barriers to cross-border licensing.

The Task Force consists of the Directors of State Medical Boards from ten Midwestern state medical and osteopathic boards. The participating boards are from Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan (Medical and Osteopathic), Minnesota, Missouri and South Dakota. The members of the Task Force have pledged to work collaboratively to achieve the Program goals and to act as liaisons between the Grant Program and their respective State Medical Boards.

An Advisory Committee provides practical, non-governmental input into the Task Force's proposals. It also reviews the Task Force's proposals to determine how they may affect practicing physicians in each of the states. The Advisory Committee consists of representatives from the Illinois State Medical Society, Indiana State Medical Association, Iowa Medical Society, Kansas Medical Society, Minnesota Medical Association, Wisconsin Medical Society, Wisconsin Association of Medical Staff Services, Wisconsin Hospital Association and the Public Health Law Center at the William Mitchell College of Law.

Currently, the Task Force is developing and implementing strategies to achieve the goals of the Grant Program. The current strategies that the Task Force is working on are (in no particular order): 1) Adoption of a regional expedited endorsement process that utilizes the Uniform Application and a common addendum; 2) Adoption of compatible licensure laws and regulations; and, 3) Adoption of a common online licensure verification system. Each of the strategies is discussed below.

2) Regional Expedited Endorsement and Compatible Licensure Laws Projects:

The Task Force has actively engaged in discussions and negotiations to develop a regional expedited endorsement process. The expedited endorsement process is meant to supplement and not supplant individual state's existing licensure processes. It is intended to be a more efficient process through which the most qualified and competent physicians can obtain licensure in multiple states. It will improve the ability of physicians that pose the least threat to the public to practice in multiple states by reducing the redundancies of state-specific applications and decreasing the complexity in obtaining and maintaining multiple licenses with varying requirements.

The Task Force is balancing each state's current licensure requirements and the other states' current licensure requirements. In most cases, all of the states have similar, if not identical, requirements. In other cases, states' requirements differ slightly. The basis of the Task Force discussions utilizes a "highest

common denominator” approach to ensure that the states with more stringent requirements maintain them, because the purpose of the project is not to lessen states’ requirements, it is to maintain or improve each state’s ability to protect the public.

While discussions continue, the Task Force is nearing consensus on requiring that a physician be actively practicing for the previous three years, be specialty board certified, have no disciplinary history or investigations pending against him or her and pass a criminal background check in order to be eligible to apply using the regional expedited endorsement process.

By the end of summer, the Task Force should finalize the expedited endorsement requirements and begin negotiating the “Declaration of Cooperation” (DOC), and present a final draft of the DOC to each of the state medical boards by the end of 2011. The DOC is a non-binding agreement among the state medical boards. It is intended to indicate each state medical board’s commitment to pursue the legal, administrative and policy changes required to become compliant and maintain compliance with the regional expedited endorsement process. Further, by signing, each state indicates that it will continue sharing information with the other the states, and continue to identify and resolve licensing issues of regional importance together.

3) Online Licensure Verification Project:

The other project is distinct from the expedited endorsement and licensure laws projects. It is to improve communication among the states and increase the amount of information that each state shares with one another. The scope of the project is to develop a fully functioning Online Licensure Verification System for MDs and DOs that allows Participating Medical Boards to electronically share secure up-to-date information about applicants applying for licensure in a different state. The Online Verification System is being developed with Grant Funds by 1.5 FTE IT Contractors and is expected to be deployed by spring 2012.

Last year, Project Staff identified three problems inherent in current interstate verification processes. First, there is lag time between when a state verifies a license and when the receiving state grants a license based on the verification. Second, states do not indicate whether it is currently investigating a licensee on their verification document. Third, there is no secure and efficient way for receiving boards and sending boards to communicate with each other.

The Online Verification System will solve the three identified problems inherent in the current verification processes. First, the system will generate real-time verification information each time the receiving board views the secured webpage. Second, it will indicate whether the licensee is currently under investigation. And, third, it will allow the sending and receiving boards to communicate using the secured verification website. Additionally, the System will allow the sending board to upload any additional documentation as requested or required by the receiving board.