

ACADEMIC RESIDENT

News and Information for Residents Interested in Academic Emergency Medicine

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Hospital Credentialing- What EM Residents Should Know

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The credentialing process is something most residents give little thought to during residency. This is understandable given the hectic nature of residency. The need to meet day-to-day residency requirements supercedes concerns about credentialing which to most residents is a distant matter to be addressed some time in the future. The fact is time moves quickly and the future is often here sooner than expected.

Unfortunately, most residents focus on credentialing at the end of their residency. They typically scramble to gather information and the documents needed for the credentialing process while at the same time trying to pack, move, and find new housing, not to mention complete last minute residency requirements. This often results in failure to comply with all credentialing requirements and delays the process of obtaining hospital privileges that are needed to begin work at your new institution. Understanding the process will afford you the opportunity to prepare for credentialing during the course of your residency and allow you to gather needed information in a careful, organized manner. By doing so, many potential mishaps and associated frustrations can be avoided.

The purpose of the credentialing process is to assure that you meet the medical staff requirements of the institution where you will be practicing. These requirements vary from institution to institution but generally include an application to practice medicine at that institution, professional references, a current state medical license and DEA certificate, residency certificate, board certification status and medical liability insurance.

The credentialing application requires generic information such as name, phone numbers, business, home and email address. The name and address of all undergraduate, medical school and other professional institutions attended is also requested. Information about all internships and residency programs and the names and contact information of the program directors is needed. Residents who completed an internship at a different institution than their residency should contact that program to update the contact information for the program director. The credentialing application may also have a disclosure section that asks questions about remediation, reprimands, denial or suspension of medical staff privileges, criminal convictions, substance abuse and personal health issues that could affect your ability to perform your duties as a physician.

Three reference letters are typically requested. These letters must be from individuals in your general field of practice who have worked extensively with you over the last three years or who has been responsible for professional observation of your work. Some institutions will accept one letter from a current partner or associate. Reference letters from relatives are not acceptable. Issues related to reference letters are one of the major stumbling blocks in the credentialing

process. One of the main problems is that reference letters are either late or never received by the requesting institution. There are many potential reasons for this particular problem. Beyond simply being busy (and forgetful), residents don't realize how many letters a given faculty member is asked to write each graduation cycle. Further, residents apply for privileges at many different institutions and not uncommonly change their mind about where (or to whom) they want their reference letter sent. This can make tracking which requests have been honored difficult. Residents should identify and approach potential authors of their reference letters early in their senior year and provide those individuals two to three months to complete and submit the letters. Friendly reminders to authors to complete the letters are usually welcome. It is appropriate to ask to be notified when the letters are submitted. Contact the institution to assure the letters have been received and properly handled.

It is generally understood that an active state medical license is a requirement of the credentialing process. Keep in mind the state license application process can take three to six months to complete. Since requirements vary from state to state, contact the state medical board in those states you are considering working in for an application and review it for any unique requirements. An individual DEA license is also required and may take just as long to obtain, so apply for one as soon as possible.

Completion of a residency program in your field of practice and board certification are required at most institutions. Be prepared to provide copies of your residency certificate and information regarding your time frame for obtaining board certification. Many institutions will grant provisional hospital privileges to board eligible physicians. Most institutions require full board certification within three to five years of being granted medical staff privileges.

All hospitals will ask for procedure credentialing that you are requesting. You may need to demonstrate actual procedure numbers for some specific procedures. Most recently, hospitals are increasingly asking for procedural competency attestations and actual numbers for conscious sedation, ultrasound, and central venous line placement. Although it may have seemed to be a mundane requirement to document your procedures, you will find that it helps tremendously during the credentialing process.

Information regarding medical malpractice claims, suits, judgments and settlements is mandatory. The nature of the claim and the outcome are the key elements sought. This information can be obtained from your hospital risk management department. Information about medical malpractice insurance coverage during your employment at the new institution is also required and can be obtained from the group you are joining or directly from their insurance carrier.

The credentialing process is an unavoidable hurdle for graduating residents.

Ultimately, it is your responsibility to make sure all requested information has been submitted. Apply early and provide accurate information. Follow-up with individuals and departments to make sure they have provided the information requested. Understanding the process will enable you to meet the requirements in a timely fashion and hopefully remove one obstacle from the road to becoming an attending physician.

Checklist

1. Send for a hospital application 3-4 month prior to start date
2. Provide accurate contact information for all institutions and individuals
3. Contact authors of professional references 2-3 months prior to start date
4. Apply for State Medical License 3-6 month prior to start date
5. Apply for DEA license 3-6 months prior to start date
6. Contact hospital credentialing department 1 month prior to graduation to check on the status