

REENTRY INTO CLINICAL PRACTICE: Tips for Handling Inquiries from Physicians

This information is a guide for the staff of state medical boards to facilitate conversations with physicians who are either considering leaving medical practice or reentering clinical practice after some time away for non-disciplinary reasons. It has been compiled by The Physician Reentry into the Workforce Project and the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB). It is based on work done to date to address the issue of physician reentry to practice, including conversations with reentering physicians and state medical board staff and members.

Introduction

Physician reentry into clinical practice can be defined as returning to professional activity/clinical practice for which one has been trained, certified or licensed after an extended period.¹

Be familiar with your board's specific procedures or policies related to physician reentry issues (as of 2012, 30 boards have reentry policy). Make sure that these are compiled in a user-friendly format that you can post on your website, or readily send electronically.

If your board does not have specific reentry policy, you may want to start by looking at:

- How your board determines if a physician is active or inactive (e.g., how is active practice defined in your statutes or rules and regulations);
- What policies or procedures your board have in place related to leaves of absence;
- What your board requires a physician to do to maintain licensure while he or she is clinically inactive; and
- What requirements or procedures your board has in place to determine fitness to practice upon a return to active clinical practice, both for physicians who have maintained licensure as well as those who have not maintained their licenses.

In 2012 the FSMB adopted the Report of the Special Committee on Reentry to Practice (<http://www.fsmb.org/Media/Default/PDF/FSMB/Advocacy/pub-sp-cmt-reentry.pdf>). The report identifies key reentry issues and offers

guidelines that provide a framework of common standards and conceptual processes for physician and physician assistant reentry.

Note that a reentering physician may be looking for resources beyond the scope of your board (e.g., information about credentialing or listing of available positions in the state). To the extent that you can direct the physician to specific websites or provide phone or other contact information, you will be providing a valuable and greatly appreciated service.

A Starting Point for Answering Common Questions from Physicians

The following is a list of common questions that physicians may have about reentry into clinical practice. Boards are encouraged to adapt these questions and answers to their specific needs, regulations, and requirements related to physician reentry.

• **How can my medical board help me?**

Be able to provide specific information regarding your board's suggestions for reentering physicians as well as your actual requirements and what type of documentation is needed. It will also be helpful if you can identify whether or not your requirements must be addressed in a specific order; and a timeline for the entire process (e.g., it usually takes about 3 months to process the paperwork).

Share the resource, *6 Reasons Why It's A Good Idea to Talk with Your State Medical Board*. It provides physicians with information about why it is important to stay in touch with their board

¹ The Physician Reentry into the Workforce Project. Accessed at www.physicianreentry.org

during the process of leaving and later reentering clinical practice.

- **Why is it important to maintain my medical license if I am not in clinical practice?**

Describe whether or not your board offers a limited license for physicians not in clinical practice, and what that entails. Share with the physician what requirements s/he must meet for license renewal if s/he wishes to maintain an active license while taking time away from practice. Explain that often it is hard to get a license back once it is no longer active. Talk with the physician about what may be required of him/her upon reentry to practice if s/he decides not to maintain an active license.

It is important for the physician to understand that 1) medical licensure renewal is based on continuing professional development even if s/he is taking a leave from clinical practice and 2) the burden of proof is on the physician to show that he or she has met the appropriate requirements for licensure (both for license renewal, if s/he wishes to maintain an active license and for license reinstatement, if s/he decides not to maintain an active license).

- **I took a leave from clinical practice and now want to practice in a different state from where I was originally licensed. What do I do?**

Requirements for reentry into clinical practice after a leave of absence vary from state to state. Advise the reentry physician to contact the state that s/he is thinking of practicing in to determine their specific requirements for reentry

physicians. The Federation of State Medical Boards maintains a Directory of State Medical and Osteopathic Boards at

<http://www.fsmb.org/policy/contacts>.

Note: Some physicians may have held licenses in several states. Review your board's position on this vis-à-vis reentering physicians.

- **Where can I find out about physician reentry resources and information available to help me?**

The Physician Reentry into the Workforce Project (www.physicianreentry.org) maintains a non-specialty specific website with resources, materials, listings of reentry programs and other information that may help physicians prepare for leaving clinical practice, provide guidance regarding what to do while the physician is out of practice, and assist in the preparation to prepare to reenter clinical practice. This includes the "Physician Reentry into the Workforce Inventory," which provides a useful and detailed checklist.

- **Where can I find a listing of physician reentry and/or assessment program?**

FSMB maintains a directory of physician assessment and remedial education programs that includes reentry programs at <http://www.fsmb.org/Media/Default/PDF/USMLE/RemEdProg.pdf>

The Physician Reentry into the Workforce Project maintains a listing of reentry programs at <http://physician-reentry.org/program-profiles/reentry-program-links/>

