Medical licensure and the changing world

An interstate compact could expedite things for physicians who wish to be licensed in other states.

BY TERESA KNOEDLER, JD

In order to treat a patient, a physician must be licensed in the state where the patient is located. A number of factors are making it desirable—and at times necessary—for some physicians to seek licensure in more than one state. For example, a physician may work in a practice that has clinics on either side of a state’s border or practice in a large multi-state system that wants its professionals to collaborate. In addition, a physician with a telemedicine practice who wishes to care for patients across state lines will need to be licensed in the states where those patients are located.

Currently, a physician wishing to be licensed in a particular state must apply to that state’s medical board and go through its licensure process. It often takes months before a license is granted. This can be challenging and frustrating for physicians and delay care for patients.

In an effort to address these concerns, the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB), which represents the 70 state medical boards for allopathic and osteopathic physicians in the United States, conceived of a way to expedite the licensure process. In 2014, it drafted language that would create an interstate medical licensure compact. The compact would permit qualified physicians to obtain expedited licensure in member states. As of early February, more than 25 states have begun the process of joining the compact. Minnesota is one of them.

About the proposal
Interstate compacts are contracts between states that permit them to collaborate without the federal government’s involvement. They are voluntary and are com-

Underlying principles of the proposed interstate medical licensure compact

- Participation creates another pathway for state licensure but does not otherwise change a state’s existing Medical Practice Act.
- Regulatory and disciplinary authority will remain with the participating states’ medical boards and will not be delegated to any entity that would administer a compact.
- A physician practicing under a license obtained through the interstate compact will comply with the statutes, rules and regulations of the compact state where he or she chooses to practice.
- State boards participating in an interstate compact are required to share complaints and investigative information with each other.
- If a physician’s license is revoked by any of the compact states, it will be immediately revoked by all other member states for at least 90 days.
For physicians who go through the expedited process, licensure will take days or weeks rather than months.

Conclusion
Because of concerns about professional integrity and public safety, medical licensure must remain state-based. Yet as health care evolves, the need for licensure in multiple states has increased. The interstate medical licensure compact is an elegant solution to a problem that affects many physicians. If Minnesota joins the compact, physicians in the state will have a faster, more efficient option for obtaining licensure in multiple states.

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