

New Product Review

This new product review is brought to AHLA through its collaboration with the National Association Medical Staff Services.

A Tool for Credentialing and Patient Safety

Paul A. Verardi, Esquire

Horty Springer & Mattern PC

*Board Member, National Association Medical Staff Services
Pittsburgh, PA*

Ask seasoned Medical Services Professionals (MSPs) to identify the most important and valuable components of an effective credentialing process and always near the top of the list is the review of a practitioner's affiliation history. Those same MSPs will often add, however, that this review is one of the most time-consuming, difficult, and risk-prone components of the entire process.

Those of us who provide counsel to MSPs, physicians, and healthcare entities in credentialing matters certainly agree on both fronts. We know that identifying and verifying a practitioner's prior affiliations and obtaining meaningful references from those institutions are essential to mitigate potential legal risks associated with negligent credentialing claims and, more importantly, to protect patients.¹

In response to this need, the National Association Medical Staff Services (NAMSS) has created NAMSS PASS™, which stands for "Practitioner Affiliation Sharing Source." NAMSS PASS™ is a secure, online tool that is intended to provide quick, easy, and inexpensive access to a comprehensive database of practitioners' affiliation history with hospitals, surgery centers, health plans, group medical practices, and other entities for the entirety of the practitioners' careers.

For this vision to achieve its fullest potential, it will need to be embraced by the credentialing community, with every healthcare entity contributing its information. Because many in that community will look to us for guidance, it is important that we understand the tool and support it.

Product Launch Information

NAMSS PASS™ was unveiled in January 2013, after several months of beta testing. But, actually, the technology to support it and the basic concept have been available for years. In creating NAMSS PASS™, NAMSS partnered with the Practitioner Hospital Data Bank (no affiliation to the National Practitioner Data Bank), which has provided an affiliation database for many hospitals

and healthcare entities for years. NAMSS simply applied its credentialing experience and expertise to improve the quality and effectiveness of this product.

NAMSS PASS™ is currently ready to accept data from hospitals and other healthcare entities, but the organization estimates that it will take approximately one to two years for a comprehensive database to be achieved. To encourage early adopters and contributors, NAMSS is providing free access to NAMSS PASS™ data for one year to all healthcare entities that contribute their data in 2013. After the first year, nominal fees will apply to access the NAMSS PASS™ database.

Once the initial data is provided to NAMSS PASS™, contributing entities will be required to provide periodic electronic updates of practitioner affiliation information so that the information in the database remains current. This can be accomplished through a simple Excel spreadsheet. A date stamp documenting and verifying the exact date when the data was last updated by the contributing healthcare entity will be provided on all queries.

Practical Benefits of the Product

A NAMSS PASS™ subscriber will be able to:

- Instantaneously obtain a practitioner's affiliation history for all of the healthcare entities where he or she has been credentialed, as reported by those healthcare entities;
- Compare and verify the NAMSS PASS™ affiliation information with the information provided on the application form;
- Perform a quick "gap analysis" to determine if any credentialing "red flags" are present; and
- Immediately print "good standing" letters on the letterheads of the contributing hospitals, if a letter for that practitioner is available. From the perspective of the querying entity, this means no more faxing or mailing requests by MSPs to individual affiliations, no more waiting for responses to be returned, and no need for second and third requests for verification. From the perspective of the responding entity, it means a safe and secure way to share affiliation history—something the facility is already doing—but now in a streamlined, easier, and inexpensive manner.

Definition of "Good Standing"

As we all know well, one of the longstanding problems within the credentialing community has been the lack of a common definition of what constitutes good standing for the practitioners who are credentialed. Ask ten MSPs, physicians, and healthcare entities what it means and you are likely to get ten different variations on the theme. Credentialing entities all want and need good-standing letters, but the industry has never developed a common understanding of what that means. One of the most helpful aspects of the NAMSS PASS™ tool is that it directly addresses the concept of good standing.

NAMSS PASS™ has developed two options for a healthcare entity to choose from in terms of the good-standing letter to be provided for its practitioners. Both of these options rely, in large

part, on the well-known federal Health Care Quality Improvement Act to provide a common definition of what is intended by the words good standing. Using a common definition, we will all finally now know what good standing means and, *just as importantly*, what it does not mean. If additional information about a practitioner's qualifications is required beyond the common definition, credentialing entities can obtain it through the questions on application forms, follow-up letters to the healthcare facilities, confidential evaluation forms sent to references, and/or phone calls to references.

We should emphasize that if a practitioner does not have a good-standing letter available for a particular entity on the NAMSS PASS™ system, that does not automatically mean there is a problem with that practitioner. There may be several reasons why a good-standing letter is not available, which may have no relevance to a practitioner's specific qualifications. The absence of a good-standing letter on the NAMSS PASS™ system simply means that the querying entity needs to contact the facility directly to ascertain why that is the case.

AHLA Member Involvement in Building NAMSS PASS™

NAMSS PASS™ has the potential to become an industry best practice in promoting quality and safety and mitigating potential legal risks, but also—given the economic climate facing virtually all healthcare entities—doing so in the most efficient and effective manner possible. In recognition of that potential, AHLA members may want to encourage physician leadership and healthcare entity management clients to support their MSPs in this effort to build a tool that can have a real and substantial effect on the entire credentialing community.

More information about NAMSS PASS™ is available on the NAMSS website.² Be sure to review the brief NAMSS PASS™ Terms of Service so that you are well informed and prepared to advise your clients who ask for guidance. When you do so, you will note that there are links to the two good-standing letters discussed above to facilitate your review. You will also note that no revisions to Medical Staff Bylaws documents or to application forms are necessary in order to participate—the existing authorization and release provisions in place at healthcare entities can be utilized.

¹ More than thirty states have recognized the tort of negligent credentialing. Montana was the most recent in *Brookins v. Mote*, 2012 WL 6134872 (Mont. Dec. 11, 2012).

² Available at www.namss.org/.

Copyright 2012 American Health Lawyers Association, Washington, DC
Reprint Permission Granted.

Practice Groups Staff

Trinita Robinson

Vice President of Practice Groups
(202) 833-6943

trobinson@healthlawyers.org

Magdalena Wencel

Senior Manager of Practice Groups
(202) 833-0769

mwencel@healthlawyers.org

K. J. Forest

Practice Groups Distance Learning Administrator
(202) 833-0782

kforest@healthlawyers.org

Brian Davis

Practice Groups Communications and
Publications Administrator
(202) 833-6951

bdavis@healthlawyers.org

Crystal Taylor

Practice Groups Activities Coordinator
(202) 833-0763

ctaylor@healthlawyers.org

Ramon Ramirez

Practice Groups Distance Learning Coordinator
(202) 833-0761

rramirez@healthlawyers.org

Tazeen Dhanani

Practice Groups Web Assistant
(202) 833-6940

tdhanani@healthlawyers.org

Dominique Sawyer

Practice Groups Distance Learning Assistant
(202) 833-0765

dsawyer@healthlawyers.org

Graphic Design Staff

Mary Boutsikaris

Creative Director
(202) 833-0764

mboutsik@healthlawyers.org

Ana Tobin

Graphic Designer/Coordinator
(202) 833-0781

atobin@healthlawyers.org