

# STATE OF THE **MEDICAL SERVICES PROFESSION**

Defining the Gatekeepers  
of Patient Safety

# Executive Summary

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**M**edical Services Professionals (MSPs) are the gatekeepers of patient safety within the healthcare industry. Through its State of the Medical Services Profession Report, the National Association of Medical Staff Services (NAMSS) seeks to raise awareness and educate others on the importance of MSPs as a true and valuable profession. The report looks to define the core functions of MSPs across the healthcare industry; stress the essential roles of, and responsibilities performed by, MSPs; provide context for career advancement in the profession; and set a clear direction of the future of MSPs as healthcare evolves. The data presented within the report is compiled from feedback and responses from MSPs across the country collected via a NAMSS Job Task Analyses (JTAs), NAMSS member surveys, focus groups, and interviews in 2014.

Over the past 40 years, the medical services profession has developed from one that encompassed primarily clerical positions to one that spans employment settings and requires a specific knowledge base and professional competencies. As the healthcare industry trends move toward standardization, centralization, and consolidation, and quality metrics become more important in the coordination of care, there will be a clear impact on the role MSPs play within the organizational environment and a need for universal, standardized processes will become even more apparent.

While there are nuances between every work environment and organizational setting within the healthcare industry, the mission—to be gatekeepers of patient safety—and core functional areas of MSPs remain the same. There are eight core functional

areas that represent the key responsibilities of MSPs to ensure all regulatory elements of credentialing and privileging are in place, regardless of healthcare setting. The core functional areas are completed by all MSPs, while the type of engagement differs based on the years of experience in the profession.

MSPs require a wide range of skills and competencies to execute the roles and responsibilities that make up the core functional areas. The skills build on each other and evolve as the years in the profession increase. While MSPs use a number of skillsets throughout their profession, the quantity of skills deemed of great importance increases as the number of years in the profession increase.

Moving forward, MSPs must remain at the forefront of their organizations and acutely aware of how the changes in the healthcare industry will impact their profession and careers. As their positions become more well-rounded with expanded core functions, MSPs will need additional education and knowledge on such topics as malpractice issues, risk management, project management, medical/healthcare terminology, critical thinking, and leadership. MSPs must continue to forge relationships across more departments and be able to effectively communicate the importance of their role and the role of their department.

MSPs are the gatekeepers of patient safety. Being able to clearly articulate their value, core functions, and role within the constantly changing healthcare landscape will further expand the profession's reach and importance.

# Overview

Through its State of the Medical Services Profession Report, the National Association Medical Staff Services (NAMSS) seeks to raise awareness, educate, and obtain recognition within the healthcare industry for Medical Services Professionals (MSPs) as a true and valuable profession. MSPs, from entry level to the most senior level in the department, are the gatekeepers of patient safety within the healthcare industry. NAMSS looks to support MSPs over the span of their careers and raise awareness of the critical role MSPs play in maintaining a trusted healthcare environment.

There are four main objectives of the report:

- Define the core functions of MSPs across the healthcare industry;
- Stress the essential roles of, and responsibilities performed by, MSPs and how these roles evolve over the course of an MSP's career;
- Provide context for career advancement in the profession; and
- Set a clear direction on the future role of MSPs as the healthcare industry evolves.

The core responsibilities, skillsets, and knowledge set forth are defined based on the feedback and responses from MSPs across the country that were collected via a NAMSS Job Task Analyses (JTAs), NAMSS member surveys, focus groups, and interviews in 2014.

It is through defining and articulating the core functions and knowledge needed for the medical services profession that MSPs can further elevate themselves as the experts in matters of credentialing and medical staff governance within the healthcare community. This foundation is the basis upon which safe and quality care can be assured for patients. The knowledgebase and skillsets needed to execute their job responsibility and create this foundation emphasizes that the career of an MSP is a chosen profession with a viable career path. Distinguishing the core responsibilities of an MSP, will allow for further growth as an essential and respected healthcare profession.

## Responsibilities of MSPs

- Credentialing and recredentialing of all practitioners
- Maintaining numerous practitioner data repositories, including education training, experience, and licensure
- Critically analyzing data to create informed recommendations for credentialing, re-credentialing, and privileging proceedings
- Maintaining an accredited continuing medical education (CME) program and providing CME for physicians and advanced practitioners to maintain their clinical competency
- Reviewing and implementing various federal rulings and accrediting body standards pertaining to the functions of the medical and/or allied health staff
- Establishing systems to facilitate meetings and communication between practitioners, both within and outside their specialties, as well as with a hospital's administration
- Developing, establishing, and enforcing of medical staff bylaws, rules and regulations, and policies that govern the activities of the medical staff and networking providers

## Background

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The medical services profession has evolved over the past 40 years from one that encompassed primarily clerical positions, to one that spans a wide range of employment settings and requires a specific knowledge base and professional competencies. With the evolution of the medical landscapes, and as more medical organizations are held liable for the negligent acts of their medical staff, the roles of MSPs have been amplified and expanded through professional certifications, formal education, and college degree programs.

MSPs are a vital part of any healthcare environment, providing the valuable assessment and assurance to support patient safety, quality care, and continued improvement for excellence in healthcare delivery.

## Landscape of the Profession

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Today, the current trajectory in the healthcare industry is toward standardization, centralization, and consolidation. With improvements in technology, payments to physicians, hospitals, and other organizations increasingly tied to quality metrics in the expanding fee-for-value system, and an ever-increasing emphasis on coordination of care; it is likely that these trends will continue into the foreseeable future.

Technological advancements such as the pervasive use of Electronic Health Records (EHRs) and the growing demand for telemedicine services have already led to the dissolution of many of the traditional barriers to standardized and centralized care. Patients are now able to see practitioners who practice across the country as well as those who are just across town. In addition, practitioners can access patient diagnoses, lab results, and clinical histories at the click of a button.

Practitioners wishing to treat patients across state lines have previously faced the daunting task of

attaining licensure in multiple states. However, the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) has already had great success in implementing its Interstate Licensure Compact, which eliminates duplicative licensure across state lines and alleviates the burden of multiple applications for practitioners.

The work of MSPs throughout the healthcare industry will also continue to be affected by the move from volume-based to value-based medicine. Physicians and other practitioner payments are increasingly based on quality outcomes. The public has direct access to a wealth of information on practitioners' performance and patient/member satisfaction. Hospitals, surgery centers, health systems, and payers will have a greater interest in recruiting and retaining high-quality, rather than highly productive practitioners.

To achieve higher quality and greater coordination of care, hospitals, health systems, surgery centers, and insurance companies have undergone significant consolidation. Hospital employment of physicians continues to expand as more and more doctors move away from private practice. Many small clinics and hospitals have been purchased by larger health systems. Payers, physicians, and hospitals have formed Accountable Care Organizations (ACOs). All of these shifts in employment and affiliations will continue to greatly affect the work of MSPs. With this fluid healthcare landscape, the need for universal, standardized processes will become increasingly apparent.

# Core Functions of the Profession

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MSPs from across the country were asked to evaluate 42 tasks and responsibilities to determine which best represent the duties, functions, and tasks they handle at all levels and years of experience. Of the 42 tasks and responsibilities, eight core functions emerged.

- These core functions represent the key responsibilities of MSPs to ensure all regulatory elements of credentialing and privileging are in place, regardless of healthcare setting. These functions answer the question, **“Which functions are essential to the successful completion of your current job?”**
- Based on level of experience, an MSP’s engagement with each core function may vary. Novice MSPs might be actively participating in certain day-to-day responsibilities within these functions while more senior MSPs will likely be managing, supervising, or reforming these core functions to ensure efficiency and productivity.

## Core Functional Areas

### **Conduct, Participate In, and Maintain Credentialing and/or Privileging**

Example: Compile, evaluate, and present the practitioner-specific data collected for review by one or more decision-making bodies.

### **Conduct, Participate In, and Maintain Primary Source Verification**

Example: Recognize, investigate, and validate discrepancies and adverse information obtained from the application, primary source verifications, or other sources.

### **Conduct, Participate In, and Maintain Current Clinical Competency Evaluations and Peer Review**

Example: Coordinate an appropriate evaluation by physician leaders of gathered data.

### **Manage Compliance with Accreditation Standards and Regulatory Requirements**

Examples: 1.) Facilitate efficient and cost-effective due process that complies with an organization’s fair hearing and appeals policy as well as applicable legal and regulatory requirements. 2.) Develop and implement a tracking system to ensure that credentialing is completed within defined regulatory timeframes.

### **Manage Departmental Operations**

Example: Audit, assess, procure, implement, effectively utilize and maintain practitioner/provider credentialing processes and information systems (e.g., files, reports, minutes, and databases) by analyzing the needs and resources of medical services/credentialing.

### **Manage the Credentialing and/or Privileging Process**

Example: Evaluate credentialing/privileging requests including evidence of education, training, and experience to determine eligibility for requested privileges, membership, and/or plan participation.

### **Comply with Accreditation and Regulatory Standards, Policies and Procedures**

Example: Participate in an ongoing assessment of governing documents (bylaws and rules and regulations) to ensure continuous compliance.

### **Manage Medical Staff Functions**

Example: Develop and coordinate on-boarding processes (orientation and training activities) to assist practitioners/providers and to meet education requirements.

\*Based on survey data of current MSPs.

The eight core function areas are supported by skills and knowledge that MSPs are expected to become more proficient in as they gain tenure in the profession.

# Skillsets by Years of Experience

MSPs require a wide range of skills and competencies to execute the roles and responsibilities that make up the core functional areas. Research shows the type and amount of knowledge and competencies needed to effectively perform in their roles progresses as the years in the profession increase. The MSPs surveyed pinpointed knowledge and skill areas

that are essential or very essential to an MSP's job performance. These skill areas develop over the span of their careers and as an MSP advances, the number of very essential skill areas necessary to perform their job functions increases to accommodate their larger responsibilities and accountability. The very essential competencies required at the start of an MSP's career focuses on understanding the role an MSP plays within their respective healthcare organizational setting, while a tenured MSP's very essential competencies include navigating the politics of their organizational setting and managerial skills.

## Skillsets for Job Function

This chart identifies the skillsets that are essential and very essential to job performance by years of experience:



■ Very Essential ■ Essential

\*Skills required based on survey data of current MSPs.

## The Profession in Different Organizational Settings

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While there are nuances between every work environment and organizational setting within the healthcare industry, the mission—to be the gatekeepers of patient safety—and core functional areas of MSPs remain the same. As the healthcare industry evolves and the healthcare environment consolidates, the role of MSPs will continue to expand, thus identifying a need to have a thorough working knowledge and awareness of how to perform the roles and responsibilities of their position across any healthcare setting. While functional areas of work may have more weight for one setting versus another and responsibilities may differ, the core functions do not change based on the workplace.

## Future of the Profession

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With these changes to the healthcare industry, the role of the medical services profession becomes even more vital to ensuring that patient safety remains at the forefront of each organization's mission. MSPs must remain acutely aware of how these changes will impact their profession, and have the ability to enhance their knowledge and presence within their respective organizations. Based on the 2014 NAMSS survey, focus group results and healthcare trends, patterns emerge across multiple settings for the next five years.

### Work Setting

Trends suggest big practices will be moving into the employee model to increase efficiency and reduce costs. In the future, the role of an MSP will be well-rounded, which will expand the core functions. As

technology continues to evolve, MSPs will see certain responsibilities reduced by automated capabilities, requiring more specialization. MSPs will need more formal education to become knowledgeable in:

- Legal and Malpractice Issues
- Consulting
- Risk Management
- Project Management
- Medical/Healthcare Terminology
- Economics
- Critical Thinking
- Leadership

Through additional professional experience, education, certification, and certificate programs, MSPs are becoming well versed in the tools and competencies needed to ensure their readiness to perform the roles and responsibilities in this ever changing healthcare environment in order to have a significant impact on patient safety.

### Relationships

With the shift to healthcare systems and managed care, MSPs will need to form relationships with all personnel who interact with a practitioner as they are entering the system. This practice will increase the need for political, relationship and negotiation skills. Personnel can include, but is not limited to, a credentialing committee, medical staff leadership, C-Suite leadership, Quality and Risk management, Legal counsel, provider enrollment, information technology, and health plans. Through partnering and collaborating with others as noted above, the profession will be successful in achieving and sustaining effective credentialing and privileging practices as the gatekeepers of patient safety and ensure it is a priority for all departments in their organizations.

MSPs are the gatekeepers of patient safety. Being able to clearly articulate their value, core functions, and role within the constantly changing healthcare landscape will only further expand the profession's reach and importance.



## About NAMSS

The National Association Medical Staff Services (NAMSS) is dedicated to enhancing the professional development of and recognition for professionals in the medical services profession and credentialing services field. NAMSS' vision is to advance a healthcare environment that maximizes the patient experience through the delivery of quality services. The NAMSS membership includes more than 5,600 medical services professionals from medical group practices, hospitals, managed care organizations, and CVOs.

**For more information visit [www.namss.org](http://www.namss.org) or call (202) 367-1196**

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With the cooperative efforts of the individuals listed below, NAMSS was able to create the following document reflecting the state of the medical services profession. Thank you for your efforts.

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