

## **NAMSS 2018 Roundtable**

### ***The Future of Digital Credentialing***

May 10, 2018

#### **Introduction**

NAMSS held its 5<sup>th</sup> annual industry roundtable, titled “*The Future of Digital Credentialing*” on Thursday, May 10, 2018 at the Dupont Circle Hotel in Washington, DC. This year’s discussion focused on digital credentialing, or the wide range of new and emerging technologies that could be used to streamline the credentialing process and cut down on inefficiencies. Digital credentialing technologies present an exciting opportunity for the healthcare industry, but need to be addressed with a keen eye towards potential obstacles and pitfalls.

NAMSS would like to thank the following industry partners for participating in this important event: *the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), Administrators in Medicine (AiM), the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO), the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), the American Hospital Association (AHA), the American Medical Association (AMA), the Council for Affordable Quality Healthcare (CAQH), DNV GL Healthcare, the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG), the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB), the Healthcare Facilities Accreditation Program (HFAP), the Joint Commission, the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA), the National Council for Quality Assurance (NCQA), and the National Practitioner Data Bank (NPDB).*

#### **Background**

In 2014, NAMSS convened its first industry roundtable to examine best practices and essential data elements in the facility credentialing process. This discussion culminated in the release of the Ideal Credentialing Standards, which identifies the 13 essential criteria for credentialing an initial practitioner applicant. In 2015, the second roundtable identified the essential common elements for payer credentialing, and 2016 saw the development and release of the standardized Verification of Graduate Medical Education Training (VGMET) form, published in partnership with NAMSS, the AHA, ACGME, and the Organization of Program Director Associations (OPDA).

In 2017, NAMSS shifted the format of the roundtable to focus on blockchain technology, which was gaining traction as a potentially transformative technology that could have significant implications for credentialing. NAMSS and Hashed Health – a blockchain technology consortium

focused on healthcare— presented the potential application of blockchain technology for provider credentialing. Participants discussed the impact blockchain could have on credentialing and emphasized the importance of a well-maintained governance structure for any new credentialing application.

## Discussion

In 2018, NAMSS convened the roundtable again to continue and expand the discussion in 2017 around new and emerging technologies for the credentialing ecosystem. The participants first heard presentations from two organizations working on developing technology for credentialing – the Professional Credentials Exchange, created in partnership with Hashed Health, and Paradigm, Inc. These presentations, focused on a blockchain-supported marketplace and a digital verification platform, respectively, provided an overview of what potential reforms technology could create for the credentialing process and what could be achieved with existing platforms on the market today.

Participants then engaged in a wide-ranging discussion about the benefits and potential pitfalls for adopting digital credentialing technology. The conversation centered around several focal points:

- 1. Process Over Technology.** Participants were impressed by the potential use cases of blockchain, digital signature, and other emerging technologies, but emphasized the importance of not getting caught up in the hype cycle of new applications without effectively planning for their uses. The participants acknowledged that developing a robust process and governance structure for new technology would be much more important than simply picking one buzzworthy innovation.
- 2. Standardization Has Proved Useful.** The roundtable participants lauded the work that has already been done regarding streamlining and standardization efforts in healthcare credentialing. Projects like the VGMET Form have set the table for standardization and shown that it is possible to improve the process using existing structures, and a similar focus should be applied to digital credentialing.
- 3. Records Are Changing.** Participants acknowledged that the notion of what a record constitutes may be changing. Institutions have evolved beyond solely paper-based records, and some are already issuing digital credentials. The model of transferring these records on an institution-to-institution basis is also evolving, and may become obsolete.
- 4. Monetization Needs to be Addressed.** Participants expressed concerns about redefining the way in which credential data is monetized. In a digital credentialing ecosystem, there need to be clear parameters about who ultimately owns the data and who is able to profit from its transmission. Without such guardrails, data exchange could quickly become a race to the bottom to undercut market competitors, which would remove focus from the ultimate goal of patient safety.

**5. Data Delineation.** Participants agreed that the credentialing process encompasses a wide range of data, and not all of the data can or should be treated in the same way. It will be essential to determine the right way to organize data, and to develop differing standards for handling different “buckets.” Suggestions included demarcating “static” data – such as the information contained in the VGMET form, which does not change over the course of a provider’s career – and “dynamic” data – such as a practitioner’s affiliation history, licenses and certifications, and practice information. Participants acknowledged that there may be a need to develop rules and potentially different systems for collecting, verifying, and transmitting different buckets.

**6. Security and Risk Management are Essential.** The credentialing system already has important protections and requirements built in to ensure the security and accuracy of the data involved. Adopting any technology that would impact the process will require a detailed, nuanced examination of the security benefits and disadvantages with an eye towards risk management for institutions, providers, and patients. Specifically, participants addressed issues around access and editing permissions for credentialing information, error-correction processes, and data protections in a digital space. While any system inherently involves some risk, participants were wary of undertaking excessive risk in the pursuit of cost-cutting and standardization, and emphasized the importance of maintaining the highest levels of security with any newly adopted technology.

### Next Steps

NAMSS will work to develop a set of Working Groups of stakeholders to flesh out potential standards requirements discussed by the roundtable participants. These groups will address individual facets of the credentialing system in which they are currently involved to work to outline governance structures and the potential adoption of digital credentialing technology.

The ultimate goal of the roundtable’s work is to create a set of standards and governance requirements that can be widely applicable to a variety of technological efforts being developed across the industry. By remaining agnostic as to the specific technologies used, NAMSS and our industry partners hope to provide guidelines to innovators hoping to develop their own technologies while ensuring that any eventual systems can impact the credentialing process in a positive way, rather than creating liabilities for patient safety.

NAMSS will work with the roundtable participants to delineate the missions of the individual Working Groups, in order to address the various concerns raised while remaining focused on achieving actionable goals.