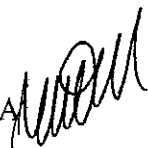




Michael D. Maves, MD, MBA, Executive Vice President, CEO

Memo to: Executive Directors
State Medical Associations

From: Michael D. Maves, MD, MBA 

Date: August 20, 2008

Subject: Federation of State Medical Boards Maintenance of Licensure Process

The goal of this communication is to alert you to a recent action taken by the Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) related to the development of a system for maintenance of licensure (MOL) for physicians. Please share this information with your medical society leadership and membership.

The FSMB established a special committee on MOL in 2003. The report of this committee was considered by the FSMB House of Delegates in May 2008. In summary, this committee developed a draft model policy that would require physicians to "take part in ongoing self-assessment and to demonstrate continuing competence in their areas of practice."¹ I strongly recommend that you review the 2008 report of the special committee,² which is available through a link on the Council on Medical Education web site at:

<http://www.ama-assn.org/go/councilmeded>

In its own review of the report and its policy recommendations, the American Medical Association Council on Medical Education found a number of areas of concern, including the following:

The report recommends that physicians with the MD degree seeking re-licensure should periodically demonstrate competence within "the scope of their professional practice," including the areas of "medical knowledge, patient care, practice-based learning and improvement, interpersonal and communication skills, professionalism, and systems-based practice."² There is no current evidence that physicians' skills in the areas identified for maintenance of licensure decay at a constant rate. The report, however, assumes that all areas should be assessed every time a physician renews his/her license.

In addition, while there are tools to assess some of these areas, the ability to measure others in a valid and reliable way does not currently exist. The report

recommends development of appropriate instruments, but provides no indication of how feasible and costly such a broad-based assessment would be.

The report recommends that physician relicensure should be based on an assessment of performance in practice. Many physicians leave practice for periods of time. This includes physicians who move into administrative or other positions without patient care responsibilities and physicians who leave practice for family or other personal reasons. The report recommendations make no provision for such physicians to retain a license during this period.

The FSMB House of Delegates endorsed a recommendation for additional research on the impact this model policy would have on state medical boards, licensed physicians, and other stakeholder organizations.¹ As the FSMB "research" agenda unfolds over the next year, state medical societies should work with their own state's medical licensing board to provide feedback to the FSMB. Such broad-based input is essential to assure that any MOL process is both valid and feasible.

The concerns expressed in this letter do not indicate a disregard for patient safety or for physician accountability. However, any process as potentially far-reaching for the medical profession as this should be subject to careful analysis and broad scrutiny. For this reason the AMA encourages state medical society members to become both informed and involved.

We would appreciate your comments. To share your views and those of your membership, or for more information, please contact Council on Medical Education Secretary Daniel Winship, MD at daniel.winship@ama-assn.org. We also strongly encourage a dialogue between your medical society and the medical licensing board in your state. We will continue to add relevant information to the Council on Medical Education web site as the FSMB process unfolds.

cc: National Medical Specialty Societies

1. Federation of State Medical Boards Takes Interim Steps Toward Maintenance of Licensure Model Policy (Released May 5, 2008).
2. Federation of State Medical Boards Special Committee on Maintenance of Licensure: Draft Report on Maintenance of Licensure (February 2008).