A Tool for Credentialing and Patient Safety
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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 rely on obtaining this information certainly agree on both fronts. We know that identifying and verifying a practitioner's prior affiliations and obtaining honest and meaningful references from those institutions are essential to mitigate potential legal risks associated with negligent credentialing claims and, more importantly, to protect patients.

In response to this need, the National Association Medical Staff Services ("NAMSS") has created NAMSS PASS™ which stands for "**P**ractitioner **A**ffiliation **S**haring **S**ource." NAMSS PASS™ is a secure, on-line resource 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 database to achieve its fullest potential, it will need to be embraced by the credentialing community, with every health care entity contributing its information.

NAMSS PASS^{TM} Release 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 ("PHDB") (no affiliation to the National Practitioner Data Bank), which has provided an affiliation database for many hospitals and health care entities for years. NAMSS is simply applying its credentialing experience and expertise to improve the quality and effectiveness of this tool.

NAMSS PASS™ is currently ready to accept data from hospitals and other health care entities, but 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 health care entities that contribute their data in 2013. After the first year, nominal fees will apply to access the NAMSS PASS™ database. Additionally, there is no cost to set up an account and upload data.

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. A date stamp documenting and verifying the exact date when the data was last updated by the contributing health care entity will be provided on all queries.

What are the practical benefits of NAMSS PASS™?

A NAMSS PASS™ subscriber will be able to:

- Instantaneously obtain a practitioner's affiliation history for all of the health care entities where he or she has been credentialed, as reported by those health care entities;

- Compare and verify the NAMSS PASS™ affiliation information with the information provided by the applicant;

- 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 and easier manner.

How does NAMSS PASS™ define "good standing"?

This is one of the most helpful and exciting aspects of the new tool. As we all know well, one of the longstanding problems for credentials committees has been the lack of a common definition of what constitutes "good standing" for the practitioners who are credentialed. These letters of good-standing are often vague and non-specific and offer little information in terms of helping credentials committees get an accurate assessment of a practitioner's true standing at that facility. Credentials committees all want and need "good standing" letters, but the industry has never developed a common understanding of what that means – until NAMSS PASS™.

NAMSS PASS™ has developed two options for a health care 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 us with a common definition, a common understanding of what is intended by the words "good standing." By using a common definition, medical staff offices and credentials committees will now have a standard definition of what the term "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 health care facilities, confidential evaluation forms sent to references, and/or phone calls to references.

I should emphasize that if a practitioner does not have a good standing letter available for a particular entity in the NAMSS PASS^{TM} 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 in the NAMSS PASS^{TM} simply means that the querying entity needs to contact the facility directly to ascertain why that is the case.

NAMSS PASS^{TM} 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. It takes what has been one of the most difficult tasks for medical staff offices to accomplish and transforms it to an efficient and standardized tool. It then allows this information to be dissimulated to the individuals and committees responsible for using this information in the assessment of potential applicants to their respective hospitals and facilities.

NAMSS PASS^{TM} will be a profound improvement in the way in which all of those involved with credentialing obtain and use our verification data.