

Primary Source Verification by Shelly Monks and Tamara Lindhorst

INTRODUCTION

Primary source verification is the process by which an individual's specific credential is authenticated directly from the original source or issuing agent of the credential. This form of verification is considered the most genuine and valid. It removes the applicant from the process, which is thought to minimize the opportunity for falsifications or misrepresentation. The concept seems logical and appropriate for the sensitive nature of health care. Patients expect that the credentials of the individuals allowed to provide their care have been verified. This sense of public trust, along with regulatory agency expectations, obligates sponsoring institutions of graduate medical education to conduct primary source verification on the credentials of all individuals who intend to participate in our training programs.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Review thoroughly all qualified applicant's curriculum vitae and the [Electronic Residency Application Service \(ERAS\)](#) applications. Gaps in time, numerous job changes, and participation in multiple graduate medical education training programs should be explained.

A letter of reference must be provided from the program director of any prior training program(s). This letter should be accepted only if printed on the prior training program's letterhead and mailed from the program. Copies should not be accepted from the applicant.

In many cases, the information not provided in the program director's letter is more informative than the actual details provided. Questions generated while reviewing these letters should be documented to assure appropriate follow-up and resolution. A follow-up telephone conversation between your institution's program director and the program director of the prior training program is strongly suggested.

If an applicant indicates that they previously held an MD or DO license, a query should be completed to the National Practitioner Data Bank. The National Practitioner Data Bank (NPDB) is a nationwide flagging system that provides a resource to hospitals, health care entities, and licensing boards investigating of the qualifications of the physicians they intend to hire, license, and grant clinical privileges. Eligible entities and individuals are able to review confidential information in the database concerning medical malpractice payments and adverse actions against the physician. For more information on the National Practitioner Data Bank refer to their Web site at www.npdb.com.

If an applicant has worked as a nonphysician health care provider (e.g., physician assistant), it is suggested that the licensing board of the state in which the individual was employed be queried to determine if a license of any type was issued. Most state medical boards have license verification on their Web sites free of charge. Queries to the state medical board may identify that an applicant has not disclosed all information, such as holding a license at the professional level in another state.

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