

Maintaining your “C”

We are all familiar with the requirements from the NCCPA for maintaining your certification – CME and recertification examinations every 6 years. NCCPA certification is required for initially obtaining a Physician Assistant license in Wisconsin. From a state regulatory perspective, there is no requirement to maintain NCCPA certification once you have a Wisconsin PA license. As long as you do not let your Wisconsin license expire, you can renew without proving NCCPA certification. If you let your state license lapse, you must be NCCPA certified to regain it.

However, maintaining NCCPA certification is becoming more important every year. Hospitals, health care organizations, and many private physician offices are starting to use NCCPA certification as part of the “definition of a PA” when writing job descriptions or credentialing providers. This is evidenced when one reviews employment postings.

Medicare’s definition of a PA is as follows....

a. **Qualifications for PAs**

In order to furnish covered PA services, the PA must meet the conditions as follows:

- 1. Have graduated from a physician assistant educational program that is accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (its predecessor agencies, the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) and the Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation (CAHEA); or*
- 2. Have passed the national certification examination that is administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA); and*
- 3. Be licensed by the State to practice as a physician assistant. (To be licensed in the State of Wisconsin, they must have the PA Certified (PA-C) status.)*

Medicare and Medicaid require NCCPA certification in order to credential a PA and allow for payment for services provided. In other words, an employer will usually not get reimbursed for services billed as PA services unless the PA is NCCPA certified. Additionally, it may be fraudulent to bill “incident to” under Medicare for services provided by a PA who does not meet the Medicare definition (NCCPA certified). There is no “incident to” option for Medicaid. So in order to bill Medicaid, one must be NCCPA certified.

Not all commercial payors credential PAs, so employers may be able to bill for services provided by an uncertified PA under the physician number. Though it is becoming more common for the commercial payors to credential PAs. If a PA is doing surgical assisting and billing for it, he/she will need to be credentialed with the payor, and the lack of certification will interfere with that. Also, most hospitals that credential PAs require current NCCPA certification to obtain privileges.

I can imagine and have heard of instances where a health care organization writes job descriptions that include NCCPA certification. Subsequent review of employee records reveals that a long time employee is not NCCPA certified. The employer could require the employee to become certified or risk termination!

It is certainly becoming clear that maintaining NCCPA certification is a necessary part of our professional practice. I would encourage everyone to maintain their NCCPA certification as reimbursement, hospital privileges, and employability will be dependant on it!