Friday, March 6, 2020

California Governor Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency for California on March 4, 2020, in response to the spread of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). The declaration makes additional resources available, formalizes emergency actions and assists the state in the event of a broader spread of COVID-19.

One of the additional resources now available is the ability for the director of the Emergency Medical Services Authority to permit healthcare practitioners licensed in another state to provide healthcare services in California during the state of emergency, effectively providing a form of “reciprocity” between California and other states. The director would have the discretion to designate the type of licensure and specialty of healthcare practitioners required, and the areas to which they may be deployed. The licensure reciprocity may be extended to all healthcare practitioners, including physicians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants.

While the director has not yet taken steps to implement this aspect of the emergency declaration, hospitals and other healthcare providers should remain informed about updates from the director and whether they may be able to engage out-of-state healthcare practitioners to provide services in their California
facilities.

Additionally, during times of national or state disasters, physicians and surgeons whose retired licenses with the Medical Board of California have been expired for less than five years may re-apply for active licensure by:

- Submitting an application with the Medical Board
- Providing documentation that the applicant has completed certain required continuing education for each renewal period during which the applicant was not licensed
- Completing a set of fingerprints with the fee required for processing those fingerprints.

Currently inactive physicians and surgeons thus may have an opportunity, as the COVID-19 situation develops, to activate their licenses to provide services during California's state of emergency.

If licensure reciprocity is initiated, hospitals and other healthcare facilities located in certain areas will have the opportunity to engage out-of-state healthcare practitioners in certain specialties to provide services in their facilities in California. These professionals could supplement staff where needed, to respond to sharp increases in patient volume or existing staff's inability to care for patients because of workforce illness and exposure. Healthcare facilities located outside of California should monitor their own state activities around licensure reciprocity and other healthcare rules and regulations in response to the spread of COVID-19.

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