



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

February 12, 2010

Dear Governor:

We are writing to share important changes in the National Practitioner Data Bank and the Healthcare Integrity and Protection Data Bank and to ask for your assistance in protecting the safety of patients across this country.

For more than a decade, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has operated two data banks - the National Practitioner Data Bank and the Healthcare Integrity and Protection Data Bank. These data banks serve as flagging systems intended to facilitate a more comprehensive review of health care practitioners, providers and suppliers who have been disciplined or named in a medical malpractice settlement.

The programs are intended to be a central source of information to assist in addressing patient safety, fraud and abuse in our health care delivery systems. The information in these national data banks is only as good as the information provided by State licensing boards and other reporting entities.

The Administration is a strong advocate for openness and transparency in health care. To ensure the provision of high quality health care, health care employers should have access to comprehensive information about the disciplinary actions taken against the providers they employ. To that end, effective March 1, 2010, private hospitals and other entities concerned with patient safety and quality will for the first time have access to information in the Healthcare Integrity and Protection Data Bank on licensing and disciplinary action taken against nurses, pharmacists, and allied health providers through the National Practitioner Data Bank. This action expands the availability of information on physicians and dentists for well over a decade to encompass other health care providers as well.

Having learned that our current data systems have some information gaps, we are taking immediate steps to address any deficiencies and obtain the missing data. We are asking each of the States and Territories and their respective health practitioner licensure boards to work with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to assure the accuracy, completeness and timeliness of the data in the data banks. As we move forward to improve and modernize the data banks, HRSA is taking the following actions:

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- Forming an action team that will work with the State designated representative to improve data reporting.
- Conducting regular data audits that will provide data back to the State licensure boards for verification and correction of missing data elements.
- Providing technical assistance to State licensing boards on opportunities to expand the use of Health Information Technology.
- Providing education and training programs for State licensing board staff on maintaining and reporting health practitioner licensure data.
- Exploring opportunities to make reporting easier.
- Establishing a process for public reporting of entities that fail to meet their reporting requirements.

We are asking the States and Territories and their respective health practitioner licensure boards to do the following:

- Provide HRSA with permission to release the data contained in the Healthcare Integrity and Protection Data Bank to the National Practitioner Data Bank.
- Work with HRSA in identifying missing data in the data banks.
- Report missing information when gaps are identified.

Finally, a report will be published by HHS by July 1, 2010, and annually thereafter that identifies governmental agencies failing to fulfill Healthcare Integrity and Protection Data Bank reporting requirements.

These represent actions that we can all take now while we continue to monitor and improve our collective processes as we move forward. Thank you for your attention to this important endeavor. Together, we can make a real difference to protect the health and safety of millions of patients.

Sincerely,



Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary



Mary K. Wakefield, Ph.D., R.N.
Administrator
Health Resources and Services Administration