

## Federation of State Medical Boards Working on an Interstate Compact for Medical Licensing

The Federation of State Medical Boards has been leading a project to consider implementing an Interstate Compact on Medical Licensure. This is not the first time a multi-state licensure solution has been discussed. Over the years there have been proposals to facilitate licensure of physicians who are already licensed in other states and whose application would present no impediments to being granted a license. Most officials involved with the licensing process would agree that a certain number of physicians would undoubtedly be granted a license in any state, but each state has its own licensing standards in law and regulations. Each state's medical board has the obligation to perform due diligence to ensure that applicants are competent and of character to practice medicine. As a result, progress toward solutions that would facilitate expedited licensure has been slow.

At present, with very limited exceptions, physicians must go through the licensing process for each state in which they want to be licensed to practice, no matter how flawless their records. As any licensed physician knows, the process of completing an application and assembling all of the documentation can be time-consuming. The work on an interstate compact has the potential to change that. At a special meeting convened in January 2013, by agreement of the many state boards attending, the Federation was encouraged to explore the interstate compact option.

### What is an interstate compact?

In general, interstate compacts are agreements between two or more states. The drafters of the United States Constitution recognized that there would be situations in

which cooperation among the states would be advantageous, and the legal authority for interstate compacts was provided in Article I, Section 10 of the Constitution. This is not a novel idea, although it is the first time there has been a serious exploration of the use of an interstate compact to facilitate medical licensure.

There are many interstate compacts in operation. They may have as few as two members, or may include all

states. Interstate compacts enable states to cooperate on a wide variety of matters. Some examples of the diverse range of matters addressed through compacts include transportation (the Port Authority of New York, the Interstate Drivers' License Compact), environment (Connecticut River Valley Flood Control Commission), and criminal justice (Interstate Commission for Adult Offender Supervision).



In broad terms, an Interstate Compact for Medical Licensure would exist as an entity to serve the common interests of its member states. As envisioned at this time, the compact agreement would establish a universal standard that, if met and maintained by a physician licensed by a participating state, would allow for a highly streamlined process to obtain licensure in other states that participate in the interstate compact. The interstate compact would not supplant the medical licensing law in any state, but instead would provide an alternative path to licensing in addition to the existing path in those states adopting the compact.

An advantage of the interstate compact as a means to achieve interstate cooperation is that once the compact terms are set, each joining state's legislature must accept the compact as a whole.

If accepted, the compact becomes part of the state's law. Because it is an all-or-nothing proposition, the compact process simplifies the debate over modifying each state's medical licensing laws. Absent an interstate compact, it would be very difficult to convince multiple state legislatures to make identical changes to their laws.

The Federation has been working diligently on a draft compact and significant progress has been made. A bi-partisan group of 16 U.S. Senators sent [a letter of support](#) for the concept in January 2014, demonstrating the importance of and interest in these efforts. With any project involving many or most states, this will not be completed overnight, but some estimate that there could be a compact document ready for states to consider by early 2015. If a certain number of states approve the compact (a number to be established by the compact document itself), the compact will come into being and rapid, easy licensing will be a reality for physicians applying for licensure in states that participate.

Physicians who are interested in simplifying the process of obtaining licensure in multiple states will be able to participate in the public debate in each state that considers the compact. As with any proposition before a state legislature, licensees will have the right and the opportunity to let their elected officials know their views on the proposed compact. Once again, this is not the first attempt at multi-state cooperation to facilitate medical licensure, but at this point many feel that it's the most promising proposal yet. The Board of Medical Practice will provide updates on the progress of the compact project.



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