

Medical Board of California Adapts to an Ever-Changing Remote Environment

Emmalee Ross

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic changed the world as we knew it. Office buildings became barren, normally congested freeways flowed freely, and sweats became the new work attire as working from home became the new normal.

Processes at the Medical Board of California (MBC) continued as California physicians and surgeons were needed more than ever to help the state respond to the pandemic.

However, adjustments were needed to the paper-based, wet-signature, snail mail procedures if MBC was to press ahead into the new era, where staff, stakeholders, and physicians were rapidly becoming remote-based.

Through two major developments, the Direct Online Certification Submission (DOCS) service and online verification of Continuing Medical Education (CME), MBC continues to forge ahead in collaboration with stakeholders, leading the way for other state medical boards.

Direct Online Certification Submission

Prior to the pandemic, MBC's Information Systems Branch was diligently working to create an electronic upload portal for medical schools and postgraduate training programs to submit primary-source licensing documents electronically.

In early 2020, it was apparent the system was needed sooner than expected as medical schools, postgraduate training programs, and MBC applicants began working from home, typically without printers, access to notaries and school seals, or a means to mail documents. MBC expedited its DOCS portal, giving access to a few medical schools and postgraduate training programs at a time, while acquiring feedback and making critical updates along the way.

DOCS quickly grew, becoming an in-demand service allowing verified and approved medical schools and postgraduate training programs the ability to submit verification forms, official transcripts, certified diplomas, letters of explanation, and more without a

notary, institutional seal, or wet signature on behalf of MBC applicants.

Feedback from both medical schools and postgraduate training program administration continues to be overwhelmingly positive, as an Arizona medical school registrar recently stated via email, "California has become one of the easiest states to submit licensing paperwork because of DOCS."

A few months into the testing phase in September 2020, DOCS had 74 medical schools, 1,018 programs, and 450 authorized users registered.

As of May 2022, DOCS has registered 223 medical schools, 2,047 programs, and has 1,552 authorized users. This number is continuing to grow as MBC receives roughly 30 registration forms weekly.

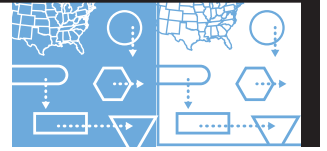
The impact DOCS has and continues to have for national and international medical schools, postgraduate training programs, MBC applicants, and MBC staff is exponential. As the workplace and medical field find the delicate balance between remote and in person working, MBC hopes to continue making processes more efficient for all parties involved.

Electronic CME Upgrade

MBC became one of the first state medical boards to join the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) on their ACCME and State Medical Licensing Boards Collaboration (www.accme.org/state-medical-licensing-boards-collaboration) which launched November 16, 2021.

This collaboration allows participating CME providers to report physicians' completed CME data directly to ACCME's Program and Activity Reporting System (PARS)—a free program intended to simplify the CME auditing process for state medical boards while reducing the burden on physicians. Once reported, the CME data is accessible to state medical boards who may require it for renewal or licensee audits.

Previously, CME auditing was a completely manual process for MBC, as California licensees kept



record of and tracked their own verification to provide MBC either by mail or email within 60 days of a required audit.

Because of this collaboration, when a California physician completes CME credits through a participating CME provider, the provider will upload their data to PARS, which is shared with MBC, whose staff can find a licensee's CME credits online. PARS only contains CME credit data reported directly by the education provider, so MBC knows it is primary source verified.

The impact on MBC staff and physicians is determined by how many CME providers are uploading CME-completion data to PARS.

As of May 2022, 79 California CME providers are working with ACCME and PARS to upload licensee data with John Muir Health Program and Alta Bates Summit Medical Center (Summit and Alta Bates Campuses) reporting the highest percentage of physician CME credit in PARS.

As more California CME providers participate—using PARS as a means to upload CME data—MBC is getting closer to changing its audit process from a paper-based audit, where multiple letters were mailed, to an electronic audit, eliminating any paper-based needs. However, for PARS to be effective, physicians should seek out and encourage their CME providers to adopt PARS as a means for uploading their CME data.

The number of California licensees with CME data in PARS continues to grow, as 1,340 licensees have CME data reported in PARS as of May 2022. ACCME and MBC are encouraged this number will continue to rise as more awareness and communication is distributed, making system processes easier and more efficient for physicians, CME providers, and MBC staff.

PARS is available to all state medical boards. Currently, participating states include California, Maine, Maryland, North Carolina, North Dakota, and Oregon.

End Goal for DOCS and Electronic CME

As MBC incorporates electronic means for gathering pertinent licensing documentation and CME information for its applicants and licensees, MBC's mission of consumer protection is at the forefront of these changes and updates.

Not only have MBC staff processes become more efficient, electronic delivery of documents and information means less room for human error or delay. Having access to online databases also eliminates the need for mailing and printing documents, which in turn saves costs for California physicians and MBC.

MBC continues improving processes in an ever-changing environment, being an example and leading the way for California and other state medical boards. ■

Table 1
Definition of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
MBC	Medical Board of California
DOCS	Direct Online Certification Submission
CME	Continuing Medical Education
ACCME	Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education
PARS	Program and Activity Reporting System

About the Author

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