



Valid licenses: how much more important can it get?
By Tim Twigg and Rebecca Crane

Do you have employees who are required to have certain licenses and/or certifications? If so, are those licenses or certifications current? When was the last time you checked?

Recently a dentist checked the Web site of the Local State Board of Dentistry and discovered that his full-time hygienist's license had not been renewed for two years! The other part-time hygienist's license had expired in February 2009.

Another dentist had a temp fill in during his hygienist's three-week vacation. When the full-time hygienist returned, she noticed her license was missing from the wall and a fake one had been placed in the frame. The practice investigated and found the temp was, in fact, a clinical assistant from another state posing as a hygienist. The doctor had to call back all 73 patients that this woman had seen for another exam and explain to them what happened. Thankfully, none of them followed up with legal action against him.

Who would have ever thought of these potential problems? Are you willing to stake your own license and practice on the assumption that the required licenses or certifications are still valid?

While it is the responsibility of the licensee to make sure his or her license or registration is current and valid, be aware that the State Board of Dentistry can hold the doctor accountable for having an unlicensed clinical staff member and apply the same penalties to the doctor as to the offending employee — meaning it could cost the dentist his or her license, along with fines or other potential legal consequences.

Having an effective protocol that requires your licensed clinical staff (regular and temporary) to produce their current license and, more importantly, verify their credentials on an annual basis will prevent this from happening to you.

Here are some ways to ensure your staff maintains valid licenses and certifications:

- Have an up-to-date, comprehensive personnel policy manual that stipulates, when applicable, that a current and valid license and/or certification is a requirement for continued employment, and ongoing verification of validity will occur.
- Have well-written job descriptions, ones that clearly outline the need for specific and valid licenses and certifications.
- As part of the annual performance review, obtain a copy of the hygienist's or clinical assistant's license/certification to ensure it's current.

In conclusion, for the health and well-being of your practice, as well as the health and well-being of your patients, every dentist should check on the status of the licensure of every one of his/her employees where a license or certificate is required.

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