

Temporary Privileges

One of the toughest issues you will face as a Medical Staff leader is the handling of temporary privileges. So why is this tough? There are a few reasons:

- First, since temporary privileges necessarily force a quicker look-see at clinical qualifications than you might like, you run a certain risk of making a mistake. Too many folks with temporary privileges increase that risk overall.
- Second, temporary privileges are often the inexcusable result of bad planning -- but they're *your* colleagues. Joe didn't plan for his vacation locum tenens? No problem -- he'll drag his replacement in on Friday afternoon and force you to give him temporary privileges.
- Third, they tend to get lost in the paperwork shuffle. Temps tend to get overlooked in both the quality loop and the normal credentialing loop. I have seen temporary privileges actually linger *longer* than the two years allowed for permanent members (and *certainly* longer than the two-year limit of the Joint Commission.⁵⁹) Not a Martha Stewart "good thing" when the Joint visits.
- The Joint Commission keeps changing the rules. JCAHO announced major limitations on temporary privileges in 2001, yet many staffs are still living in the 90s.

For these reasons, the Joint Commission pays particular attention to temporary privileges them at survey time. Yet temporary privileges, granted with care, are necessary and appropriate to the proper functioning of a hospital. Your job is to strike the balance between careless overuse on the one hand and grinding the place to a halt on the other.

1. OK, first some fundamentals . . .

Where do we start? The best place is probably the Temporary Privileges Checklist at the end of this manual.⁶⁰ This will give you a broad practical overview of the process and guide you each step of the way. You might also want to have a quick look at a representative application form⁶¹ and at an approval letter that imposes conditions.⁶² These three documents should give you a hands-on practical view of what the governing documents require. So what do they require?

The Bylaws set forth the basic rights on temporary privileges.⁶³ There, you will find three sets of standards. First, the Bylaws tell physicians the circumstances under which they may apply for privileges.⁶⁴ Generally, only initial applicants who are ready for the MEC and practitioners who fill important patient care needs qualify.⁶⁵ Second, the Bylaws specify what standards applicants have to meet.⁶⁶ Third, the deciders have standards for granting or denying

⁵⁹ MS Standard 4.20, Element of Performance 8 (proposed for 2007) limits the granting of clinical privileges to two years.

⁶⁰ Checklist 14: Handling Temporary Privileges [Appendix F]

⁶¹ See, e.g., "Temporary Privileges Application Form", Form 21 [Appendix G].

⁶² Letter Approving Temporary Privileges, With Conditions, Form 23 [Appendix G].

⁶³ Bylaws [Appendix A], Section 6.2, pages 14 – 16.

⁶⁴ Bylaws [Appendix A] Section 6.2.1, page 14.

⁶⁵ On a historical note, Bylaws used to allow two very different categories, locum tenens applicants and "one or two patients" applicants. The Joint Commission no longer recognizes these types. See page 94, below.

⁶⁶ Bylaws [Appendix A] Section 6.2.4, page 15.