

## **Board adopts new approach to monitoring licensee health issues**

November 18, 2016 **Newsletter:** [Forum, Fall 2016](#)

The Board has received feedback in the recent past that its practice of asking renewing licensees to disclose medical conditions that might impair or limit ability to practice may in fact deter licensees who need help from seeking it. This led the Board to evaluate the value of information collected through this renewal question and, ultimately, decide to change its approach.

Beginning sometime in December or January, the Board will require licensees completing renewal to acknowledge a statement of NCMB's expectation that they appropriately address personal health conditions, including mental health and substance use issues, without disclosing specific details. The change was approved at the Board's September meeting. The wording of the statement (published at right) was developed by NCMB in collaboration with the NC Medical Society and the NC Physicians Health Program.

Multiple factors contributed to NCMB's decision. Over the past year, the Board has spent time considering whether the renewal question may be an obstacle to licensees seeking assistance. Forgoing treatment can contribute to burnout, impact quality of care or, in extreme cases, lead to major depression or suicidal thoughts. This is a growing problem among medical professionals across the nation, as well as in NC. The Board is committed to doing its part to encourage licensees to seek the help they need without fear of repercussion.

As the Board considered its existing renewal question, it became clear that the current question is sufficiently broad in its definition of "medical condition" that licensees frequently over report health concerns. This results in unnecessary staff review of renewal applications in which there is no true threat to patient safety. After thoroughly considering the matter, NCMB concluded that the existing renewal question wasn't effective at identifying licensees who may need review, and might actually be actively deterring individuals from seeking help.

The Board is indebted to several groups that have helped NCMB better understand the reasons licensees may not seek medical attention, especially for mental/ emotional health concerns. The NC Consortium for Physician Resilience and Retention has been instrumental in bringing together stakeholders, including the NC Medical Society, Cone Health, the NC Physicians Health Program, NCMB and other organizations that deal with the impact of this trend. The Consortium is committed to identifying opportunities to address mental health, wellness, and burnout among medical professionals in the state. The Board is proud to participate in the Consortium and looks forward to identifying more opportunities to support the health needs of its licensees.

## See the new renewal questionnaire language below

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The Board voted in September to replace the current renewal question that asks licensees to state whether they are under treatment for a condition that may adversely affect their ability to practice with the following language:

*Important: The Board recognizes that licensees encounter health conditions, including those involving mental health and substance use disorders, just as their patients and other health care providers do. The Board expects its licensees to address their health concerns and ensure patient safety. Options include seeking medical care, self-limiting the licensee's medical practice, and anonymously self-referring to the NC Physicians Health Program ([www.ncphp.org](http://www.ncphp.org)), a physician advocacy organization dedicated to improving the health and wellness of medical professionals in a confidential manner.*

*The failure to adequately address a health condition, where the licensee is unable to practice medicine with reasonable skill and safety to patients, can result in the Board taking action against the license to practice medicine.*