

## **PHYSICIANS SEEKING TO RETURN TO CLINICAL PRACTICE: CHARACTERISTICS AND DEMONSTRATED CLINICAL ABILITIES**

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**Introduction:** The issue of physicians returning to clinical practice after a prolonged absence is currently of great interest to physicians, state licensing boards, and the public. Physicians leave practice for a variety of reasons, including to care for children or aging parents, for personal and health reasons, or to pursue other careers. In the past several years, physicians returning to the workforce have faced barriers, primarily due to the realization that lifetime competence is not conferred at the time of acquisition of a medical diploma or training certificate.

CPEP, the Center for Personalized Education for Physicians, has been conducting assessments of physician clinical competence since 1990. In 2003, CPEP developed a specific evaluation protocol to address the needs of these physicians returning to practice after an extended leave. This was based on observations that a number of physicians were referred for Assessments solely due to a prolonged absence from clinical practice.

**Purpose:** The purposes of this study are to identify some of the characteristics of physicians who are seeking to return to practice after an absence, to review the outcomes for participants in a program developed to address educational needs of this physician population, and to identify trends or factors that might predict physician performance.

**Methods:** Participants in the CPEP Physician Re-entry Program provided data about their personal and professional characteristics and licensure status at the time of participation using participant-completed forms; data were also obtained from conversations between program staff and these physicians. Outcome data were derived from the completed participant Re-entry Analysis report. Subsequent and/or current licensure status was derived from publicly available licensure databases as well as individual physicians.

**Results:** Participants were characterized according to practice specialty, length of time out of practice, reason(s) for leaving practice, as well as other factors. The overall performance of these physicians is described, based on the analysis of reported results; additionally, the success of these physicians in achieving licensure status that would allow them to practice is reported based on identifiable public sources.

**Conclusions:** This analysis describes CPEP's experience with physicians who sought assistance in returning to practice through a physician re-entry program. Using licensure status as a proxy for success, the report describes the outcomes of these physicians in returning to practice. While some trends exist regarding physician performance, it is not yet clear if a physician's demonstrated abilities, and therefore readiness to return to practice, can be predicted in advance.