

Referring a Physician for Assessment

When to Consider Making a Referral

Assessment of a currently or previously licensed physician can assist with questions about:

- Appropriateness of decision-making needed for adequate patient management
- Timing of response to pertinent patient presentations and clinical data
- Depth and breadth of clinical knowledge necessary to address patient needs
- Ability to respond to and make appropriate decisions in stressful situations
- Consistency of care provided
- Other issues related to patient care management

A referral for assessment may also be appropriate in the following situations:

- Evaluation of the clinical competence of a physician who has been out of practice for an extended period
- Identification of educational activities needed to enhance physician practice patterns or assist in career transitions
- Review of the clinical capabilities of a physician with personal health concerns including recovery from disabling illness or injury, neurocognitive concerns, substance abuse, or other issues that may impact practice

The assessment programs that collaborate with PLAS have assessed hundreds of physicians for reasons that range from endorsement of licensure to reentry to practice to license reactivation after disciplinary action.

How to Refer a Physician

The referring agency, the physician, or the physician's counsel should contact an assessment program directly to make a referral. It is helpful if information on issues prompting the referral is provided.

Information Requested when Referring a Physician for Assessment

The following information may be requested from the referring agency or person at the time of referral:

- Reason for referral for assessment
- Additional concerns (e.g., disruptive behavior, sexual misconduct issues)
- Compliance timeframe mandated for assessment, including deadline (if any) for receipt of the assessment outcome report
- Status of investigation or action
- Brief history of interactions(s) with referring entity
- Known practice distractors or more global issues
- Other markers and indicators (e.g., medical board actions, hospital actions, malpractice suits)

Scheduling an Assessment

After receipt of any necessary intake materials and fees, staff at the assessment center will contact the physician to identify and confirm assessment dates.

The time from physician enrollment to the release of the assessment outcome report to the referring agency is generally a seven to nine week process:

- Allow three to four weeks after the physician submits the required materials to schedule the assessment;
- The assessment is conducted onsite at the assessment center program and may take one to two days, depending on the physician's specialty and level of assessment required;
- Allow an additional three to four weeks after the assessment is completed for development of the assessment outcome report.

Assessment programs collaborating with PLAS are committed to making every effort to meet deadlines set by the referring agency. To ensure an efficient process:

- Notify the assessment center of any key dates (deadlines or meetings) as early as possible in the referral process;
- It is helpful to be specific about due dates for submission of materials for scheduled agency meetings.

Encouraging Compliance and a Timely Assessment

In our experience, physician-participants are more likely to contact an assessment program and enroll in an assessment within a timely manner when the referring agency provides them with a written timetable.

State boards may wish to consider using the following sample language for mandating a clinical competence assessment:

Example #1:

Within 30 days of the effective date of this Order, Respondent shall contact the XXX for the purposes of enrolling in an assessment. Respondent shall complete the assessment and sign the written assessment outcome report within 120 days of the effective date of this Order.

Example #2:

Within 60 days of the filing of this Order, the licensee shall arrange, at his own expense, entry into the XXX for an assessment. Licensee shall complete the assessment within 150 days of the filing of this Order.