



*Bringing physicians together
for a healthier Ohio*

October 23, 2020

Michael Schottenstein, MD
President
State Medical Board of Ohio
30 East Broad Street, 3rd Floor
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Dr. Schottenstein:

The Ohio State Medical Association (OSMA) would like to bring an issue to your attention that we believe needs addressing as soon as possible. Recently, the OSMA was contacted on two separate occasions by physician offices who were having trouble contacting medical board staff to quickly verify the identity of a medical board investigator who contacted the practices on the phone. We realize, in this time of COVID-19, board investigators are most likely reaching out to practices via phone rather than in-person. Therefore, it is imperative that physicians and their office staff have a quick and reliable mechanism to verify an investigator's identity.

To illustrate our concerns further, I will share the basic details of the two calls we recently received:

1. In the first call we received, a medical board investigator called the practice to ask questions about a standard of care complaint that the board had received. As is normal practice, the investigator did not reveal the name of the patient but asked to speak to several of the office staff and the physician in question. Initially, the practice did not question whether the investigator was an employee of the medical board but following their experience, the practice called the OSMA concerned that they had no way of verifying the identity of the investigator and, for all they knew, they could have given a lot of confidential information to a member of the media or someone seeking to harm the practice by sharing confidential information. It was determined that this investigator was legitimate, but the practice shared their experience and asked the OSMA to look into what could be done to assist practices in being able to quickly verify an investigator's identity.
2. The second call we received was more disturbing. In this case, a practice was contacted by a gentleman who said that he was a medical board investigator working in conjunction with the FBI. The "investigator" talked to the practice manager and to the physician in the office. Both the practice manager and the physician felt that the person they were speaking with might not be legitimate and they tried to reach the board to verify his identity before providing any sensitive details. They could not reach anyone at the board who could quickly verify his identity or whether he had a reason to be contacting them. They called the OSMA and asked us to help.

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The OSMA contacted board staff members and we were quickly told that they would look into the issue. However, the board staff were not able to immediately resolve whether or not this person was an employee of the board. Within a few days, the OSMA received a call from an FBI agent, who had been contacted by the medical board, stating that the person who called the practice was indeed not a medical board employee or an FBI employee. The FBI agent called the practice to alert them to the fraudulent caller and even learned that the fraudulent investigator used technology to make it appear that the call was coming from the medical board's offices. This is very concerning.

The OSMA is urging the medical board to institute a mechanism that would allow a physician or office staff to quickly verify the identity of a medical board investigator. Ideally, a physician should be able to call a dedicated hotline and immediately speak with a board representative. Usually, when a board investigator calls a practice, the practice is already nervous and unsure of what they should say/do. Being able to quickly verify that the person on the phone is legitimate would help allay any fears that the practice may have.

The OSMA is confident that the medical board will take our request into consideration as we know the medical board is just as concerned about these issues as we are. We will do our part and work with the board and other medical associations to alert physicians that, unfortunately, fraudulent activity does sometimes occur.

The OSMA appreciates the work you do for the patients and physicians of Ohio and we look forward to hearing back from you about this important issue. If you have any questions, please contact the OSMA's Director of Regulatory Affairs, Jennifer Hayhurst, at 614-527-6766 or jhayhurst@osma.org.

Sincerely,



Anthony Armstrong, MD
President

c: Todd Baker, CEO, OSMA
OSMA Council