



WHITE PAPER

REGULATORY COMPLIANCE:  
GAINING EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS  
WITH A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

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## REGULATORY COMPLIANCE:

### Gaining Efficiency and Effectiveness With a Comprehensive Approach

It's not easy running a physician practice. Providing prompt, appropriate, cost-effective and compassionate care to a diverse patient population is hard enough; however, there are also other things to worry about, such as whether the organization is in compliance with the myriad of regulations that govern physician practice operations. Agencies like the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (**OSHA**), Department of Transportation (**DOT**) and Environmental Protection Agency (**EPA**) all have intricate—and sometimes overlapping—rules. Moreover, legislation such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (**HIPAA**) adds even greater complexity.

Oftentimes what makes compliance challenging, especially for smaller practices with limited resources, is the sheer magnitude of the effort. The rules are constantly changing with new requirements emerging and old ones updating. Plus, as healthcare facilities take on new technology, dispense more advanced drugs, and change the way they interact with patients, they may have to start meeting particular standards—and they may not even know it.

### Taking a Holistic View

The good news is that there are ways to streamline the compliance process to make it more effective. Organizations that take a strategic, comprehensive approach across various areas of compliance can realize economies in both time and resources.

For example, there is significant crossover between certain regulatory agencies. Physician practices may not have to craft unique policy language or stand-alone training programs to meet the requirements of each agency. A physician practice looking at compliance holistically can realize overlapping areas and use similar verbiage to meet both sets of requirements without having to recreate the wheel.

To be in compliance, a physician practice may not need a separate training program for each set of regulations. Rather, it may be able to offer one over arching program that covers the unique elements of all three standard sets, as well as the requirements they share.

Looking at compliance holistically also allows staff to see the connections between different regulations, painting a larger compliance picture. Not only can this help them better understand the reasons behind the rules and how they affect the organization's operations, but it can spark creative ideas in how to realize reliable compliance. The more an organization involves staff at the ground floor, the more engaged they will be in compliance—an essential element in sustaining performance over time.



*The rules are constantly changing with new requirements emerging and old ones updating.*

## Important Aspects of a Universal Strategy

Once a physician practice commits to comprehensive compliance, there are some key steps involved in moving from goal to reality:

- **Appreciate the scope.** First and foremost, physician practices must familiarize themselves with the applicable regulatory requirements in all necessary compliance areas. This may involve researching the diverse rules and determining which apply based on a practice's size, clinical focus and characteristics.
- **Perform a gap analysis.** After learning about what's required, the practice should compare its current performance with relevant regulations to identify any holes. At this time, organizations may want to perform an in-depth review of existing policies, observe operations, talk with staff about how they ensure compliance and so on. This will help them better understand their current compliance efforts and what needs to change to foster a more comprehensive approach.
- **Update policies.** Detailed policies are essential for effective compliance. Physician practices should make sure their existing policies are accurate and up-to-date, making any additions necessary to close identified gaps based on its gap analysis. As previously mentioned, there is a lot of crossover between the different regulatory bodies, so organizations should watch for opportunities to apply the same language in various policies.
- **Provide training.** Organizations should have a program in place that educates staff on what is required. This can specifically focus on those areas where compliance has been lacking, as well as new opportunities to address compliance in a more holistic manner. Training can take many forms but should include real-world examples and opportunities to practice. Organizations should offer annual refresher training, new staff orientation and retention exercises, such as periodically quizzing staff or having them engage in sample scenarios.

## Practices Aren't Without Resources

Although compliance can be easier when viewed holistically, it is still a large and important undertaking for smaller practices. Keeping up with the moving parts of various regulations can be a tall order, and many physician practices don't have the time or means to do the work. Fortunately, there are outside resources that can facilitate better compliance. For example, organizations can turn to professional associations or other physician practices that have strong programs.

An especially valuable resource is a third-party partner that has deep expertise in a variety of regulatory environments. This type of partner can assist a practice in retooling its compliance efforts, helping with everything from understanding what requirements apply to crafting policies and training programs that foster consistent rule-following.



## Selecting the Right Partner

Not all compliance partners are the same, and it's essential to pick a partner that can help your practice holistically, efficiently and effectively approach compliance efforts. Organizations should consider the following key characteristics when selecting a partner:

- **Depth of knowledge.** The first step in any good compliance program is getting a handle on the scope and intent of applicable regulations. A strong partner must have expansive knowledge in many areas, such as OSHA, HIPAA, hazardous waste disposal and more, so it can make sure the practice does not overlook critical requirements. This broad knowledge base also lets the partner appreciate and capitalize on the crossover between different standards. For example, if a partner has expertise in waste management and disposal as well as OSHA regulations, it will be able to ensure the practice not only disposes of hazardous waste properly but in a way that adequately preserves staff safety and health.
- **Keeps up with constant changes.** The regulatory landscape is anything but static. As such, a potential compliance partner must be able to stay abreast of all the changes and understand which of those apply to a practice and how the practice must respond. The ideal partner will allow the practice to focus on what it does best—delivering patient care—while the partner takes on the task of keeping up with shifting rules and addressing them effectively.
- **Offers a comprehensive assessment.** A third-party compliance partner should have the expertise to thoroughly assess a practice's current operations and identify potential gaps in compliance. From this, the partner should be able to develop a robust yet manageable compliance program that the practice can easily follow across various areas of regulation.
- **Assists with policy development.** A partner should have sample policies that practices can adapt to their needs, based on the gaps identified in the compliance assessment. For instance, a resource might offer an online questionnaire that a practice could complete in a relatively short amount of time. Based on the responses, the vendor could generate a sound policy draft. It could then work with the practice to finalize the policy. Again, if the partner has expertise across multiple regulatory bodies, it can apply similar verbiage in different scenarios to address all applicable standards
- **Provides wide-ranging training resources.** A good partner should deliver an in-depth training program that is convenient for staff. This may include online training that staff can take at their leisure. The training should be regularly updated so that the practice knows its staff is receiving the most current information. In addition to online options, a partner could supply real-world scenarios that practices can use during staff meetings and other times for hands-on compliance practice. Completing training in a comprehensive way can also impress upon staff the necessity of compliance for the practice and its patients.

## Reliable Compliance is Comprehensive

Ultimately, practices will be more reliably compliant if they address compliance in a more holistic and strategic way. To do this, they can partner with an outside expert that serves as a one-stop resource as opposed to pursuing compliance on their own and in siloed areas. By working with this kind of partner, an organization can consistently maintain compliance without taking time and staff resources away from patient treatment and care.

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- *and maintain a holistic*
- *approach to compliance,*
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