I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the physicians in Wisconsin for the hard work they put in every day caring for the people of our state. Yours is a profession that requires a huge amount of education, perceptiveness, compassion, and a commitment to the highest standards of ethics and practice. Requirements for education and practice are put in place to protect the public and to ensure that no one is practicing or representing themselves to be a physician without meeting these rigid standards.

The Medical Examining Board (MEB), chaired by Gene Musser, MD, is responsible for licensing and regulating physicians in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing (DRL) assists the MEB in carrying out its responsibilities.

There are currently more than 23,500 physicians and more than 1700 physician assistants who hold credentials in Wisconsin. During an average year, the MEB receives around 400 complaints about physician practice. Approximately 70% of these cases are not pursued beyond a review by an initial screening panel because there’s no evidence of a violation or insufficient evidence to allow prosecution. About half of the complaints received involve allegations of negligent practice. Almost 20% involve either alcohol or drug abuse or drug diversion.

Currently, DRL’s Division of Enforcement is investigating or prosecuting 210 open cases. Our goal is to investigate these cases and take disciplinary actions, where appropriate, in a timely manner, to protect patients in cases where violations are found.

To help the DRL and the MEB investigate and resolve cases in a timelier manner, Governor Jim Doyle included a proposal in his budget to create 13 new positions at DRL and transfer 8.93 existing positions into a new Medical Board Services Bureau. The Governor’s proposal was modified by the Joint Committee on Finance to include 6 new positions instead of 13. The new positions and operations costs would be paid for by increasing licensure fees to the MEB professions. Kudos to the Wisconsin Medical Society for its support of this initiative.

The new Bureau would also handle all credentialing for the MEB. DRL recently assigned additional staff to work on processing medical credentialing, which already has cut down the time it takes to obtain a credential. DRL and the MEB are also exploring ways to simplify the process of obtaining a Wisconsin license for physicians already licensed in Minnesota.

The MEB has also been busy recently with several initiatives including the following:

- Participation in a National Governor’s Association project to facilitate licensing for telemedicine that would allow a physician in another state to consult on a remote basis in caring for a patient in Wisconsin. Marshfield Clinic has applied for a grant to assist in exploring this process with several states in the Upper Midwest. The MEB has offered Marshfield Clinic its support in the pursuit of this grant.

- Recommending to the legislature that criminal background checks be required for all new applicants for licensure.

- Reviewing current Graduate Medical Education (GME) requirements for licensure. Options such as an increase in the residency requirement period and a new resident credential are under consideration.

- Reviewing current Continuing Medical Education (CME) requirements for license renewal.

The MEB and DRL are also working together to bring back the “Regulatory Digest” for the medical field. This communication, which will be e-mailed, will include information on new laws, rules and initiatives as well as disciplinary actions taken by the MEB.

Recently, I have had several opportunities to meet with medical professionals to share some of the same information I have outlined here and to engage in a dialogue with physicians about how we can work better together.

I plan to continue to meet with physicians around the state and to share information through various means such as the Wisconsin Medical Journal.

Thanks again for all you do caring for the people of Wisconsin.
The mission of the Wisconsin Medical Journal is to provide a vehicle for professional communication and continuing education of Wisconsin physicians.

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