

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Reader Question: Ward Off This Potential Patient Safety Disaster: Validate Nursing Licensure

Question: We are aware of a facility in our region that hired an LPN whose license had expired, which surveyors (and the facility) detected when the nurse made a serious medication error. In the light of that "wake up call" and also a media report where a facility accidentally hired a "fake" RN who was really a certified nursing assistant, we're looking at changing our protocol to ensure our nurses hold licenses in good standing. What's a surefire way of doing so and generating documentation showing that we checked the person's licensure status?

Answer: Ask nurses to present a picture ID and nursing license when they apply for a position. That approach helps to avoid the problem of someone getting a job by using a stolen nursing license and other falsified identification.

Even then, a nurse's license could have disciplinary actions pending against it or the license might even have been revoked within the window for renewal.

Find out if your state health department or agency responsible for nursing licensure has a Web site and, if so, check the status of the person's license. In Michigan, for example, you can check a nurse's license by keying in the person's name or license number. The Web site lists any disciplinary actions or complaints pending against the license and is updated frequently. You can print the search results, which is public information ... and place it in the employee's file.

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