

**PHYSICIANS' ACCREDITATION PROGRAM
COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT
DIVISION OF WORKERS' COMPENSATION**

What is the accreditation program?

The program is an educational program, mandated by statute, to train physicians on aspects of the workers' compensation system. In order to participate effectively, physicians must understand the purposes of the system and their role as health care providers. Through this program, physicians gain an understanding of the importance of the "return to work" philosophy in achieving maximum improvement in the injured worker. They are trained to formulate permanent impairment ratings and are familiarized with the application of the Medical Treatment Guidelines, as well as the *AMA Guides to the Evaluation of Permanent Impairment*, 3rd Edition (revised). At the conclusion of the course, physicians will have acquired the concepts needed for their practice in treating injured workers.

Who should be accredited?

Any licensed Colorado physician, chiropractor, podiatrist or dentist may become accredited by taking a course and successfully completing the initial examination. The program needs physicians of all specialties, since workers receive all types of injuries on the job, requiring varying types of treatment. Anyone with an interest in treating injured workers and, especially, in performing impairment ratings, should enroll in the program. Not only do they receive special training, they are supplied with literature, and informed of rules and regulatory changes that impact the field over time.

Medical providers from all geographic areas of the state are encouraged to apply. As part of its accreditation training programs, the Division includes a home-study option for those who do not wish to travel in order to attend a seminar.

Who is qualified to become accredited?

Level I accreditation is primarily oriented to licensed chiropractors, although dentists, podiatrists, and MDs/DOs may apply. Level I accreditation prepares providers to be "treating physicians" in the system, and for some, ensures that they receive reimbursement for treating "time loss" injuries (those rendering the patient unable to return to work for more than three working days).

Level II accreditation is primarily for those licensed MDs/DOs wishing to evaluate impairments of injured workers. The training focuses on the technical aspects of applying rules, regulations and guidelines to the medical situation at hand. Level II physicians can act as treating physicians and/or they can join peer review panels in the system (IME program, Utilization Review program) to evaluate the work of other providers.

What are the benefits of becoming accredited?

Chiropractors who become level I accredited are then assured that they may receive compensation for treating workers' compensation patients beyond ninety days after the first treatment, or in excess of twelve treatments, whichever occurs first (provided there is continuing medical necessity). Also, chiropractors, podiatrists and dentists may find Level I Accreditation useful for expanding their practice and/or enhancing their ability to "partner" with medical providers or networks. Although most M.D.s and D.O.s pursue Level II Accreditation, Level I provides support to physicians and valuable information about working within the workers' compensation system for those who prefer not to perform impairment ratings yet have a practice in which they often treat injured workers. Navigating through the workers' comp system can be challenging at times for all parties; Level I accreditation assists the physician, chiropractor, dentist or podiatrist with understanding and meeting especially the medical/legal demands of the system.

Physicians may find it convenient to become Level II accredited, since some managed care companies are using the Level II certificate as a credentialing criteria when inviting physicians into their network. There is a suggestion that some managed care companies or networks may begin to require Level I accreditation of MDs/DOs who wish only to treat injured workers (and not render impairment ratings), although this is currently not widespread. Also, becoming accredited and participating in the workers' compensation system provides opportunities to keep abreast of current trends in occupational medicine and to informally network with other providers that treat injured workers. The Division's Independent Medical Examinations program, which exclusively uses Level II physicians, especially gives doctors the opportunity to learn about their peers' practice in workers' compensation.

What if I don't want to treat any type of injury except, for example, orthopedics?

A physician who is fully-accredited is certified to assess impairment for any body part or condition. However, the program allows physicians who practice in certain specialties to limit their accreditation. Examples of such limited accreditation include orthopedics, pulmonology, and psychiatry. The provider that chooses to limit his accreditation indicates that fact on his registration material. He will then be instructed on which workshops he must attend or which course materials he must study, and which test questions he must answer in order to successfully complete the exam. Upon completion, he will be listed on the state accreditation list as an accredited doctor with a limited field of designation. (For example, an ophthalmologist's accreditation may limit him/her to render impairment ratings only for injuries to the eye.)

Can I render impairment ratings if I am not accredited?

No. Colorado law requires that only licensed physicians with Level II accreditation may provide impairment ratings of injured workers. C.R.S. 8-42-101 (3.6)(b). This includes only licensed medical doctors and doctors of osteopathy. Although professionals with other degrees may be involved in the treatment of or the assessment process with patients, (e.g., a licensed psychologist) they may not render final impairment evaluations.

Is there professional support for physicians in the program?

Yes. The Division provides participants with a curriculum, the medical treatment guidelines and a copy of the AMA Guides, 3rd Edition (revised), all of which are useful and necessary in determining medical and impairment outcomes in workers' compensation cases. In addition, the Division contracts with a licensed physician as its Medical Director. The Medical Director must have experience in occupational medicine, and advises the Division on issues of accreditation, impairment rating guidelines, medical treatment guidelines, and case management. The Medical Director is also available to consult with medical providers who have questions or problems relating to subjects under the accreditation "umbrella." The Division also employs a consultant that assists accredited physicians who may have questions involving application or understanding of the rules or impairment guidelines, and who also reviews medical reports submitted in connection with the Division's IME program. The tutor is available on appointment to consult with any provider requesting such assistance. Finally, the Medical Policy Unit of the Division has specialists available to assist providers with questions about billing, the medical fee schedule, and application of the medical treatment guidelines.

How do I begin the process to become accredited?

To seek Level I or Level II accreditation, you must contact the Physicians' Accreditation Program (303-318-8763) and request a registration form. The form will be sent to you with instructions on how to proceed. The cost for the Level I accreditation course and exam is \$200.00. Initial Level II accreditation costs \$400.00. There is also a fee for renewing accreditation after the initial three-year period is completed (\$150.00 and \$400.00 for Level I and Level II, respectively). The Division offers accreditation seminars several times a year, and includes a home-study option. The cost and study materials are the same, regardless of the method of study.