

Retired Osteopathic Physicians Volunteer Services Through a Limited License

Are you considering retirement, but don't want to relinquish your license? The Department of Health, Division of Medical Quality Assurance (DOH-MQA) can convert your active license to a limited license if you volunteer your services to the Department of Health's Volunteer Health Care Provider Program (VHCPP) upon retirement. Osteopathic physicians who spend part of the year in Florida, but wish to retain active licenses in other states may also apply for a limited license in Florida. Limited status gives you the opportunity to volunteer your services to the needy without incurring license fees. The limited license only requires you meet your regular continuing education credit and renew your license every two years.

When you volunteer your services through a community program that is affiliated with the VHCPP your volunteer organization simply provides you with a signed form documenting the hours volunteered. Under Chapter 456, Florida Statutes, and Florida Administrative Code Section 64B15-13.005, MQA can credit osteopathic physicians with continuing education credit on an hour-for-hour basis, up to 25 percent of the continuing education requirement.

Since volunteers under these programs are considered "agents of the state" there is no practice liability for the volunteer services you provide through the VHCPP. Chapter 110, Florida Statutes, provides volunteers with the same legal protection (sovereign immunity) that is available to all state employees. This statute gives health care providers the opportunity to volunteer and use their skills for helping others without having to worry about liability. Section 766.1115, Florida Statute, extends practice liability protection if a lawsuit results from volunteer services at one of the affiliated VHCPP sites. Patients must seek any remedy against the State of Florida, not the individual volunteer or volunteer organization participating in this program.

Hundreds of retired physicians in Florida continue to provide access to health care for uninsured, low-income persons through participation in the VHCPP. Volunteering your medical skills allows you to contribute to your community, and still have time to enjoy retirement. You and the medical director of the volunteer program work out the amount of time you practice, scope of practice, and resources available to support your clinical volunteer services.

The VHCPP is not just for retirees. Any practitioner wishing to make a difference in their community can volunteer their services and take advantage of the continuing education credit without incurring liability. To enroll and view a list of programs affiliated with the VHCPP, visit www.doh.state.fl.us/mqa and select the Board of Osteopathic Medicine.

The 1992 Legislature passed the Florida Health Care Access Act, which established the VHCPP. The VHCPP is a Florida Department of Health Program. The mission of the VHCPP is to increase access to health care for indigent people in Florida through the use of volunteer licensed health care professionals. Over 100 community-based organizations throughout the state are affiliated with the VHCPP.

The mission of the Department of Health, Division of Medical Quality Assurance, is to protect and promote the health of all persons in Florida by diligently regulating health care practitioners and facilities. MQA regulates more than 750,000 health care practitioners and facilities. MQA, in conjunction with 22 boards and six councils, regulates 37 health care professions and six facilities. MQA evaluates the credentials of all applicants for licensure, issues licenses, analyzes and investigates complaints, inspects facilities, assists in prosecuting practice act violations, combats unlicensed activity, and provides credential and discipline history about licensees to the public. Visit www.doh.state.fl.us/mqa for more information about MQA.