



Highlights of [GAO-08-271T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

In a report issued in May 2006, GAO examined compliance with the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) physician credentialing and privileging requirements at seven VA medical facilities GAO visited. VA's credentialing process is used to determine whether a physician's professional credentials, such as licensure, are valid and meet VA's requirements for employment. VA's privileging process is used to determine which health care services or clinical privileges, such as surgical procedures, a VA physician is qualified to provide to veterans without supervision. Although GAO cannot generalize from its findings, GAO found that the seven facilities were complying with credentialing requirements. However, the facilities were not complying with aspects of certain privileging requirements. To better ensure that VA physicians are qualified to deliver care safely to veterans, GAO made three recommendations to improve VA's privileging of physicians. GAO was asked to testify today on (1) how VA credentials and privileges physicians working in its medical facilities and (2) the extent to which VA has implemented the three recommendations made in GAO's May 2006 report that address VA's privileging requirements. To update its issued work, GAO reviewed VA's policies, procedures, and correspondence related to physician privileging and interviewed VA central office officials to determine if the recommendations made in GAO's May 2006 report were implemented.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-271T](#). For more information, contact Randall B. Williamson at (202) 512-7114 or williamsonr@gao.gov.

VA HEALTH CARE

Improvements Made in Physician Privileging Policies, but Medical Facility Compliance Has Not Been Assessed

What GAO Found

VA has specific requirements that medical facility officials must follow to credential and privilege physicians. VA requires its medical facility officials to credential and privilege facility physicians periodically so that they can continue to work at VA. Facility officials verify the information used in the credentialing process and query certain databases that contain information on disciplinary actions that have been taken against a physician's state medical license and have information about a physician's professional competence. Each physician also must complete a written request for clinical privileges that is reviewed by the physician's supervisor who considers whether the physician has the appropriate professional credentials, training, and work experience. In addition, every 2 years, the supervisor is to consider information on a physician's performance, such as a physician's surgical complication rate, when deciding whether to renew a physician's clinical privileges.

In a May 2006, GAO examined compliance with VA's physician credentialing and privileging requirements at seven VA medical facilities it visited and made three recommendations designed to improve aspects of privileging and oversight of the process. The three recommendations were to

- provide guidance to medical facilities on how to collect individual physician performance information in accordance with VA's credentialing and privileging policy to use in medical facilities' privileging process,
- enforce the requirement that medical facilities submit information on paid VA medical malpractice claims to VA within 60 days after being notified that the claim is paid, and
- instruct medical facilities to establish internal controls to ensure the accuracy of their privileging information.

VA reports that it has implemented all three recommendations by establishing policy and guidance for its medical facilities. However, GAO does not know the extent of compliance with these requirements at VA medical facilities.