

reasonably believes that the action taken was warranted by the then known facts, obtained by reasonable efforts. Nothing in this chapter is intended to, nor does in any way or manner, abrogate or lessen the existing common law or statutory privileges and immunities of an insurer, agent authorized by that insurer to act on its behalf, licensed rating organization, or any authorized governmental agency or its employees.

SEC. 5. Labor Code 139.2 is amended to read:

139.2. (a) The administrative director shall appoint qualified medical evaluators in each of the respective specialties as required for the evaluation of medical-legal issues. The appointments shall be for two-year terms.

(b) The administrative director shall appoint or reappoint as a qualified medical evaluator a physician, as defined in Section 3209.3, who is licensed to practice in this state and who demonstrates that he or she meets the requirements in paragraphs (1), (2), (6), and (7), and, if the physician is a medical doctor, doctor of osteopathy, doctor of chiropractic, or a psychologist, that he or she also meets the applicable requirements in paragraph (3), (4), or (5).

(1) Prior to his or her appointment as a qualified medical evaluator, passes an examination written and administered by the administrative director for the purpose of demonstrating competence in evaluating medical-legal issues in the workers' compensation system. Physicians shall not be required to pass an additional examination as a condition of reappointment. A physician seeking appointment as a qualified medical evaluator on or after January 1, 2001, shall also complete prior to appointment, a course on disability evaluation report writing approved by the administrative director. The administrative director shall specify the curriculum to be covered by disability evaluation report writing courses, which shall include, but is not limited to, 12 or more hours of instruction.

(2) Devotes at least one-third of total practice time to providing direct medical treatment, or has served as an agreed medical evaluator on eight or more occasions in the 12 months prior to applying to be appointed as a qualified medical evaluator.

(3) Is a medical doctor or doctor of osteopathy and meets one of the following requirements:

(A) Is board certified in a specialty by a board recognized by the administrative director and either the Medical Board of California or the Osteopathic Medical Board of California.

(B) Has successfully completed a residency training program accredited by the American College of Graduate Medical Education or the osteopathic equivalent.

(C) Was an active qualified medical evaluator on June 30, 2000.

(D) Has qualifications that the administrative director and either the Medical Board of California or the Osteopathic Medical Board of California, as appropriate, both deem to be equivalent to board certification in a specialty.

(4) Is a doctor of chiropractic and meets either of the following requirements:

(A) Has completed a chiropractic postgraduate specialty program of a minimum of 300 hours taught by a school or college recognized by the administrative director, the Board of Chiropractic Examiners, and the Council on Chiropractic Education.

(B) Has been certified in California workers' compensation evaluation by a provider recognized by the administrative director. The certification program shall include instruction on disability evaluation report writing that meets the standards set forth in paragraph (1).

(5) Is a psychologist and meets one of the following requirements:

(A) Is board certified in clinical psychology by a board recognized by the administrative director.

(B) Holds a doctoral degree in psychology, or a doctoral degree deemed equivalent for licensure by the Board of Psychology pursuant to Section 2914 of the Business and Professions Code, from a university or professional school recognized by the administrative director and has not less than five years' postdoctoral experience in the diagnosis and treatment of emotional and mental disorders.

(C) Has not less than five years' postdoctoral experience in the diagnosis and treatment of emotional and mental disorders, and has served as an agreed medical evaluator on eight or more occasions prior to January 1, 1990.

(6) Does not have a conflict of interest as determined under the regulations adopted by the administrative director pursuant to subdivision (o).

(7) Meets any additional medical or professional standards adopted pursuant to paragraph (6) of subdivision (j).

(c) The administrative director shall adopt standards for appointment of physicians who are retired or who hold teaching positions who are exceptionally well qualified to serve as a qualified medical evaluator even though they do not otherwise qualify under paragraph (2) of subdivision (b). In no event shall a physician whose full-time practice is limited to the forensic evaluation of disability be appointed as a qualified medical evaluator under this subdivision.

(d) (1) The qualified medical evaluator, upon request, shall be reappointed if he or she meets the qualifications of subdivision (b) and meets all of the following criteria:

~~(1)~~ (A) Is in compliance with all applicable regulations and evaluation guidelines adopted by the administrative director.

~~(2)~~ (B) Has not had more than five of his or her evaluations that were considered by a workers' compensation administrative law judge at a contested hearing rejected by the judge or the appeals board pursuant to this section during the most recent two-year period during which the physician served as a qualified medical evaluator. If the administrative law judge or the appeals board rejects the qualified medical evaluator's report on the basis that it fails to meet the minimum standards for those reports established by the administrative director or the appeals board, the administrative law judge or the appeals board, as the case may be, shall make a specific finding to that effect, and shall give notice to the medical evaluator and to the administrative director. Any rejection shall not be counted as one of the five qualifying rejections until the specific finding has become final and time for appeal has expired.

~~(3)~~ (C) Has completed within the previous 24 months at least 12 hours of continuing education in impairment evaluation or workers' compensation-related medical dispute evaluation approved by the administrative director.

(4) (D) Has not been terminated, suspended, placed on probation, or otherwise disciplined by the administrative director during his or her most recent term as a qualified medical evaluator.

(2) If the evaluator does not meet any one of ~~these~~ *the* criteria specified in paragraph (1), the administrative director may in his or her discretion reappoint or deny reappointment according to regulations adopted by the administrative director. In no event may a physician who does not currently meet the requirements for initial appointment or who has been terminated under subdivision (e) because his or her license has been revoked or terminated by the licensing authority be reappointed.

(e) The administrative director may, in his or her discretion, suspend or terminate a qualified medical evaluator during his or her term of appointment without a hearing as provided under subdivision (k) or (l) whenever either of the following conditions occurs:

(1) The evaluator's license to practice in California has been suspended by the relevant licensing authority so as to preclude practice, or has been revoked or terminated by the licensing authority.

(2) The evaluator has failed to timely pay the fee required by the administrative director pursuant to subdivision (n).

(f) The administrative director shall furnish a physician, upon request, with a written statement of ~~its~~ *his or her* reasons for termination of, or for denying appointment or reappointment as, a qualified medical evaluator. Upon receipt of a specific response to the statement of reasons, the administrative director shall review his or her decision not to appoint or reappoint the physician or to terminate the physician and shall notify the physician of ~~its~~ *his or her* final decision within 60 days after receipt of the physician's response.

(g) The administrative director shall establish agreements with qualified medical evaluators to assure the expeditious evaluation of cases assigned to them for comprehensive medical evaluations.

(h) (1) When the injured worker is not represented by an attorney, the medical director appointed pursuant to Section 122, shall assign three-member panels of qualified medical evaluators within five working days after receiving a request for a panel. If a panel is not assigned within 15 working days, the employee shall have the right to obtain a medical evaluation from any qualified medical evaluator of his or her choice. The medical director shall use a random selection method for assigning panels of qualified medical evaluators. The medical director shall select evaluators who are specialists ~~of the type selected by the employee~~ *whose specialty is relevant to the injury for which the evaluation is sought as identified by the report of the treating physician*. The medical director shall advise the employee that he or she should consult with his or her treating physician prior to deciding which type of specialist to request.

(2) The administrative director shall prescribe a form that shall notify the employee of the physicians selected for his or her panel. The form shall include, for each physician on the panel, the physician's name, address, telephone number, specialty, number of years in practice, and a brief description of his or her education and training, and shall advise the employee that he or she is entitled to receive transportation expenses and temporary disability for each day necessary for the examination. The form shall also state in a

clear and conspicuous location and type: "You have the right to consult with an information and assistance officer at no cost to you prior to ~~selecting~~ *the selection of a* doctor to prepare your evaluation, or you may consult with an attorney. If your claim eventually goes to court, the workers' compensation administrative law judge will consider the evaluation prepared by the doctor you select to decide your claim."

(3) When compiling the list of evaluators from which to select randomly, the medical director shall include all qualified medical evaluators who meet all of the following criteria:

(A) He or she does not have a conflict of interest in the case, as defined by regulations adopted pursuant to subdivision (o).

(B) He or she is certified by the administrative director to evaluate in an appropriate specialty and at locations within the general geographic area of the employee's residence.

(C) He or she has not been suspended or terminated as a qualified medical evaluator for failure to pay the fee required by the administrative director pursuant to subdivision (n) or for any other reason.

(4) When the medical director determines that ~~an employee has requested an evaluation by a type of specialist that is appropriate for the employee's injury, but~~ there are not enough qualified medical evaluators of ~~that~~ *the appropriate* type within the general geographic area of the employee's residence to establish a three-member panel, the medical director shall include sufficient qualified medical evaluators from other geographic areas and the employer shall pay all necessary travel costs incurred in the event ~~of the employee selects~~ *selection of* an evaluator from another geographic area.

(i) The medical director appointed pursuant to Section 122, shall continuously review the quality of comprehensive medical evaluations and reports prepared by agreed and qualified medical evaluators and the timeliness with which evaluation reports are prepared and submitted. The review shall include, but not be limited to, a review of a random sample of reports submitted to the division, and a review of all reports alleged to be inaccurate or incomplete by a party to a case for which the evaluation was prepared. The medical director shall submit to the administrative director an annual report summarizing the results of the continuous review of medical evaluations and reports prepared by agreed and qualified medical evaluators and make recommendations for the improvement of the system of medical evaluations and determinations.

(j) After public hearing pursuant to Section 5307.3, the administrative director shall adopt regulations concerning the following issues:

(1) Standards governing the timeframes within which medical evaluations shall be prepared and submitted by agreed and qualified medical evaluators. Except as provided in this subdivision, the timeframe for initial medical evaluations to be prepared and submitted shall be no more than 30 days after the evaluator has seen the employee or otherwise commenced the medical evaluation procedure. *The administrative director shall develop timeframes governing availability of qualified medical evaluators for unrepresented employees under Sections 4061 and 4062. These timeframes shall give the employee the right to the addition of a*