

BRIEFLY...

Highlights of Report Number: 02-06-207-04-431, to the Assistant Secretary for Employment Standards Administration

WHY READ THE REPORT

In 2005, the Office of Workers Compensation Programs (OWCP) reported contract nurses handled 17,186 cases and were able to have 8,088 workers return to work. Contract nurses are assigned to newly injured workers to obtain information, evaluate the level of disability, and notify District Offices (DOs) of pending surgery or prolonged recovery. Contract nurses also coordinate medical care and return-to-work issues, and can transfer cases for vocational rehabilitation or more aggressive medical intervention.

WHY OIG DID THE AUDIT

This audit was conducted in response to a complaint from a former OWCP contract nurse whose allegations included noncompliance with nurse licensure policies and unnecessary access to confidential medical records. Our audit was limited to examining the OWCP procedures used to verify contract nurse licensure and also the procedures that restrict contract nurse access to confidential medical records. Our objectives were to determine if: (1) OWCP license verification procedures were adequate for contract nurses; and (2) OWCP procedures restricting contract nurse access to confidential medical records were adequate. Our audit period was January 1, 2003, through December 31, 2005.

READ THE FULL REPORT

To view the report, including the scope, methodology and agency response, go to:

<http://www.oig.dol.gov/public/reports/oa/2006/02-06-207-04-431.pdf>

SEPTEMBER 2006

OWCP: Licensure and Confidentiality Procedures for Contract Nurses

WHAT OIG FOUND

OWCP had procedures in place requiring verification of nurse licenses during contracting and hiring. However, these procedures did not require periodic review to ensure that licenses were renewed and in good standing. Rather, OWCP policy was to leave the periodic review process to the discretion of the individual DO. Consistent license verification can reduce OWCP's risk of not timely identifying license restrictions or the failure to renew licenses.

OWCP's policy requires the claimant to be responsible for notifying medical providers when a contract nurse should or should not receive medical information. However, OWCP communications with claimants do not state the claimant's level of responsibility for notifying medical providers regarding nurse access to medical information and claimants were not notified when contract nurses were no longer actively assigned the claim. As a result, contract nurses may unnecessarily receive access to confidential medical records.

WHAT OIG RECOMMENDED

The OIG recommended the Assistant Secretary for Employment Standards:

1. Establish and implement policies and procedures for verification of licenses to determine renewal and good standing at regular intervals for its contract nurses.
2. Establish practices to clearly and consistently communicate with claimants delineating their responsibilities so that contract nurses do not have unnecessary access to confidential medical records.

In her response to the draft report, the Assistant Secretary for Employment Standards concurred with the findings and recommendations. She stated that procedures will be developed by October 31, 2006.