Include all credentialed physicians in hospital find-a-doctor searches

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In New York, several independent-practice physicians with privileges at a hospital or health facility found their names were not included in the organizations’ website find-a-doctor search functions. By contrast, physicians employed by the hospital or facility were listed, according to an AMA Board of Trustees report adopted at the November 2020 AMA Special Meeting.

When the independent-practice physicians asked why they weren’t included, they were told the website was being updated, among other reasons. They were eventually included in the web search function after asking. The episode raised concerns about credentialed physicians being deprived of potential new patients because they were harder to find online. Patients also may have lost out on needed care because they were unable to locate a physician or return to one, says the report.

Additionally, excluding these physicians from websites may place undue pressure on those doctors to consolidate their practices into larger systems.

“While some guidance exists for certain standards, such as listing credentials, disclosures or conflicts of interests in a public forum, very little is codified as to when and in what manner physicians’ general information should be included or presented,” says the trustees’ report.

To promote the availability of credentialed and practicing physicians in any setting, the House of Delegates directed the AMA to:

- Work with relevant stakeholders to encourage decision-makers at all appropriate levels that all credentialed physicians be included in health care organizations’ website listings and search functions in a fair, equal and unbiased fashion.
- Support efforts to ensure that physicians, through their medical staffs, are able to provide input on what information is published.
Work with relevant stakeholders to encourage health care organizations to notify credentialed physicians when a website is about to be changed if there is reason to believe that such a change could affect how physicians are listed or if they are listed at all.

Through its Organized Medical Staff Section, produce and promote educational materials, trainings and any other relevant components to help physicians advocate for their own inclusion on facilities’ websites and search functions.

“Patients are best served when hospital websites promote access to all physicians credentialed by the facility, whether hospital-employed or independent,” said AMA Board Member Mario E. Motta, MD. “With almost no public policy or regulation governing the listing of physicians in public-facing promotional websites operated by hospitals and health systems, the new AMA policy fills a gap in needed standards for medical staff inclusion.”