

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS NOTICE? SCAMS TARGETING PHYSICIANS

Earlier this year, a COPIC-insured physician received a notice in the mail from the American Board of Pulmonary Disease. The notice said that the physician had failed to register important details about his practice and also asked for payment for a certification confirmation. Below is an abbreviated version of what he received. Can you spot the things that would raise concern about the legitimacy of this letter?

AMERICAN BOARD OF PULMONARY DISEASE
51 N. 3rd STREET, SUITE 103
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106
E-mail: certification@linuxmail.org

IMPORTANT NOTIFICATION REGARDING ALL CERTIFICATION IN PULMONARY DISEASE: COMPLETE REQUIREMENTS BY JUNE 25, 2019 IN ORDER TO PREVENT A CHANGE IN DIPLOMATE STATUS. THIS IS A MANDATORY REPORT AND A VERY IMPORTANT REQUIREMENT TO CONTINUE CERTIFICATION IN PULMONARY DISEASE AT THIS TIME. YOU ARE ON RECORD HAVING FAILED TO PREVIOUSLY REGISTER, AND MUST COMPLY.

Dear Doctor Smith,

Certification Status Verification of Diplomates requires, in order to continue having Diplomate status: for Medicare, Obamacare, the new enforcement of the U.S. Code Title 18 Section Number 1861, [42 U.S.C. 1395x] Part E, by the United States Government, enforcement has already begun closing down hospitals in the state of Idaho and requires filling out of list of hospitals presently being used, listing of states where you are licensed, statement regarding any malpractice cases recently filed against you, and certification confirmation fee payment of \$500 for Pulmonary Disease Certification Status Verification at this time. The certification confirmation registration does not constitute new Pulmonary Disease diplomate certification or recertification.

Payment with check or money order made to: American Board of Pulmonary Disease. Certification Confirmation Registration Form and Fee should be received no later than June 25. Certification Confirmation Registration fee is fully tax deductible. We request that the matter of registration be taken care of as soon as possible. There are no extenuating circumstances.

CERTIFICATION CONFIRMATION REQUIRED FORM

PREFERRED SPELLING OF NAME AND DEGREE:

E-MAIL:

OFFICE PHONE:

CELL PHONE:

LISTING OF STATES WHERE YOU ARE LICENSED:

LISTING OF HOSPITALS PRESENTLY USED:

STATEMENT REGARDING ANY MALPRACTICE CASES FILED AGAINST YOU IN PAST YEAR:

STATEMENT OF ALL BOARDS CERTIFYING YOU:

DATE OF LAST CERTIFYING OR RECERTIFYING EXAMINATION IN ANY MEDICAL SPECIALTY:

I HEREBY AFFIRM THAT THE ABOVE STATEMENTS ARE TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY AND I WISH TO CONTINUE CERTIFICATION IN PULMONARY DISEASE.

SIGNED _____ DATE _____

SEND THIS FORM, SIGNED AND DATED, AND FEE OF \$500 MADE TO: AMERICAN BOARD OF PULMONARY DISEASE

AREAS OF CONCERN

1. There is no such organization as the American Board of Pulmonary Disease.
2. The email address is not legitimate and there is no phone number or contact person listed.
3. The terminology used is highly suspect:
 - a. No credible medical organization would reference "Obamacare."
 - b. The phrase "hospitals presently being used" is not accurate.
 - c. There is no such thing as a Pulmonary Disease Certification Status Verification.
4. The format of the letter is very awkward—one long paragraph and inadequate space to provide answers on the form section—and there are several typos.
5. There are numerous references to sending a payment (with no option to pay by credit/debit card) and a sense of urgency to respond.

Physicians and medical practices are not immune to fraud schemes. Similar to scams that target general consumers, there are common tactics that we see used: impersonating official organizations, attempting to adopt formal terminology specific to a group of people, and trying to create a sense of urgency to avoid legal/disciplinary action.

Another scam we have seen in recent years involves individuals posing as DEA officials who call or email DEA-registered practitioners and threaten legal

action for supposed violations of federal drug laws or involvement in drug-trafficking activities. The “DEA officials” tell practitioners that they can pay a fine via wire transfer to avoid arrest, prosecution, and imprisonment.

Physicians may think they are not susceptible to these type of scams, but the level at which they are occurring indicates that criminals have had some success.

Guidelines to consider in order to protect yourself:

- Know that organizations, such as the DEA, will never contact practitioners to demand money or any other form of payment.
- Recognize that there are numerous ways to impersonate officials. With the DEA scam, tactics included callers using fake badge numbers or names of well-known DEA senior officials as well as falsified numbers on caller ID that appear as a legitimate DEA phone number.
- Remember that certain information provided (e.g., license number, patient information, or other personal details) to make a request seem legitimate may be something that can be found via open access sources online or through social media.
- Poor grammar and/or typos are often dead giveaways seen in scams.
- If you are placed in a high-pressure situation, don't get caught up in feeling you need to respond immediately. Ask for the person's contact info so you can get back to him or her.
- Examine the sender's info with scrutiny; does the email seem legitimate? Is there appropriate contact information that can be verified?
- Never provide sensitive information about yourself and/or your patients.
- Report any suspicious activity to relevant organizations (DEA, medical or specialty boards, FDA, etc.).
- Be sure to inform your staff members of potential scams, what to look for, and how to handle them.