Board Certification
A Process for Strengthening Trustee Leadership and Accountability

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In our era of heightened government scrutiny around board responsibility, hospital governing boards have a profound responsibility to their hospital and community to be knowledgeable and have a full range of skills that will qualify them to make the effective decisions for the future of the organization. Trustees have a very important role to play in carrying out the delivery of health care in their local community and region.

An effective board member doesn’t just happen. It takes knowledge, understanding, dedication, and commitment. How a health care organization invests in its leaders often times defines its commitment to the community, the mission of the organization, and its future. Health care organizations not only require traditional governance skills and qualities, but a special awareness of a complicated industry. Board members often come to the board responsibility with little, if any, preparation for the task of overseeing their community hospital.

Health care organizations are constantly finding themselves under the microscope of legislators, community members, media and government officials regarding governance accountability. Many people agree that if health care leaders do not establish standards and governing criteria for performance and leadership, federal or state governments eventually will.

The Minnesota Hospital Association Trustee Council has developed this special voluntary board certification program designed to make a good board member great and a committed board member an exceptional asset. This certification is a process of verifying an individual trustee’s initiatives to improve personal health care knowledge, leadership effectiveness and compliance with a variety of governance best practices. Certification is a viable way of assuring various stakeholders that Minnesota’s hospitals hold themselves to high standards and are accountable for their governing performance.

Your benefit from this experience will be a knowledgeable board member who is an ambassador and champion for your facility and the community. Benefits from certification help in promoting consistent standards, a better understanding of critical issues facing health care organizations, meaningful leadership and enhancing public trust.
Why certification?
This certification process has been designed for hospital trustees as part of a larger effort to hold Minnesota hospitals to a higher standard of accountability. By its use, participating hospitals are demonstrating a commitment to improve performance of their boards, encouraging trustees to pursue ongoing education and educating trustees about their responsibility in serving their community. It also provides trustees with an opportunity to move beyond the basics of governance to a forward thinking, strategic understanding of the health care environment and how to move their hospitals’ mission and vision to a new level.

Advantages to board certification
- Increased knowledge and skill development of health care issues
- Moving from reactive to proactive in their approach to strategic planning
- Understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the board and the CEO
- Increased awareness of financial accountability and performance
- Improve knowledge about effective governance best practices
- Better understanding of public policy and the importance of trustee involvement in contacting their legislators and getting involved in advocacy and grassroots at the community level

Governance standards
- Commitment to hospital and community
- Fiduciary duties of care, loyalty and obedience
- Educational development
- Adherence to conflict-of-interest policies
- Participation in self, board and CEO performance evaluation
- Board meeting preparation

How do I participate and earn credits?
To participate in the MHA Trustee Certification program, you must complete the Enrollment Form and attend educational programming on governance topics.

For purposes of the MHA Board Certification program, continuing board education focuses on topics “larger” than the individual hospital. Components of the certification include: effective governance, strategic planning, quality and patient safety, fiduciary and board development.

A total of 35 credits (one hour per credit) will be needed to complete the Certification process. A maximum of 20 percent, or 7 credits, of a trustee’s total education credit hours can be earned through outside organizations such as the Governance Institute, AHA Annual Meeting or AHA Center for Healthcare Governance. All courses taken outside of MHA need approval from MHA. For consideration, a Course Approval Form must be sent to MHA for approval of both category and credit.

MHA’s role
The Minnesota Hospital Association will register trustees and send brochures and marketing materials of approved upcoming educational programs directly to the enrolled trustee. MHA will also track the trustee’s progress in meeting requirements and completing the required educational components. Once the trustee has reached the 30 credit mark of completed education, the MHA notify the trustee which credits are needed to complete certification.
**Components of trustee certification**

**Principles of effective governance**
- Mission, vision and values
  - Bylaws
  - Policies and procedures
- Basic
  - Basic role in governance
    - Leader and vision vs. manage
- Legislative policy priorities
  - Governmental regulations
  - Advocacy / grassroots / policy priorities
    - How to be a state or national advocate
- Legal issues
  - Commitment to compliance
- Conflict of interest
  - Confidentiality
  - Ethics
    - Sarbanes Oxley
    - Corporate compliance
- Functions of the board
  - Selecting and supporting the CEO
  - CEO compensation / performance review
  - Communication – with CEO, other board members, doctors, staff, and community
  - Lines of authority
    - Acting alone vs. at the direction in representing the board

**Strategic planning and positioning**
- Setting goals
- Leadership principles
- Trends
- Developing policies for overall operation
- Board role in physicians relations
  - Appoint and maintain a qualified medical staff
  - Credentialing
  - Hospital/doctor relationship model
  - Antitrust issues
- Community relations
  - Understanding the marketplace

**Board role in quality / patient safety**
- Assess and improve the quality of care
- What to expect at board meetings
- Ensure adherence to quality and patient safety standards and expectations
  - Websites

**Fiduciary duties**
- Health care finance fundamentals
  - Understanding financial statements
  - Standards of measures / ratios
- Budgeting process
- Access to capital
- Facility design and construction / growth

**Board development and self-assessment**
- Commitment to on-going education
- Core functions
- Assessing governing accountability
- Board performance
- Board self-assessment

**General**
- All other more general types of educational programs

**Certification core activities**
Certification requires participation in any of the following media that provide governance education: web-based training, audio-conferencing, video courses, state and national conference and other activities listed below providing unique instructional content on governance topics and issues.
- 12 education units in principles of effective governance
- 8 education units in strategic planning and positioning
- 4 education units in fiduciary duties
- 4 education units in board development and self-assessment
- 4 education units in quality/patient safety
- 3 education units in general
Basic standards of board involvement

- Demonstrate basic knowledge of hospital mission, vision and bylaws
- Participate in board and committee meetings as required by hospital bylaws
- Participate in board education
- Participate in a board self-assessment (if applicable)
- Participate in annual CEO evaluation (if applicable)
- Introduce yourself to your state representative and senator as a board member of your hospital and contact them as requested by hospital CEO or MHA when appropriate
- Comply with conflict of interest policy and abstain from voting when appropriate

Timeframe and personal investment

Participants are expected to invest their time and energy to complete the components for certification. It is recommended that you have a minimum of one year board experience to begin the certification process. This certification will result in trustees being acknowledged as mentors, ambassadors and champions for their facility and community.

This certification process will take approximately two years involving educational and personal aspects to help guide the trustee to a final “Governance Certificate”. The certificate will be presented to each trustee upon successful completion of the program.

This learning experience will develop expertise in trustee governance.