Reclassifying Clinical Non-Core Privileges to Core Privileges in Healthcare: A Balancing Act Between Patient Safety and Organizational Efficiency

Dr. Nishant Jaiswal

Abstract: *Healthcare organizations grant clinical privileges to healthcare practitioners, allowing them to perform certain clinical activities and procedures to provide specific patient care within the facility. This study examines the reclassification of non-core privileges into core privileges within healthcare settings, focusing on its implications for patient safety, provider satisfaction, and organizational efficiency. The study explores key drivers, benefits, and risks, emphasizing the importance of strategic safeguards to ensure a balanced approach between patient safety and operational goals. The article aims to analyze the reclassification of clinical privileges in healthcare, focusing on its drivers, potential outcomes, and the strategic frameworks necessary to balance patient safety with organizational efficiency.*

Keywords: Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS), Clinical Privileging, Credentialing, GAHAR, JCI, NABH, WHO

1. Introduction

Healthcare organizations must carefully manage the clinical privileges granted to practitioners to ensure patient safety and high-quality care. Healthcare privileges granted to medical professionals to practice specific scopes, and content of patient care within specific healthcare settings, are crucial for delivering quality patient care[1].

The appropriate allocation of privileges after credentialing based on verifying a provider's qualifications, license, experience, and competence to treat patients, is essential to minimize risks of malpractice, improve patient outcomes, and build trust with patients and their families[2].

According to Joint Commission International, In November 2004, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) issued its position on privileging addressing the concept of core/bundle privileging. It is in line with the Joint Commission's expectations. Organizations are also encouraged to determine if any state-specific law/regulation exists that addresses the use of a core/bundled privileging model[3].
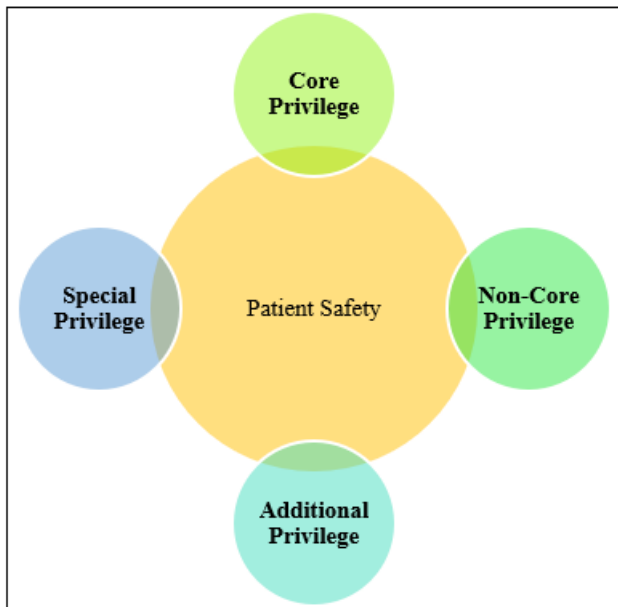
Based on that national regulatory bodies and international accreditation bodies started implementing privileges to ensure patient safety and quality of care.

The privilege can be categorized in different ways, including core area, non-core area, additional area, or specific or specialty area of privileges.

Component	Core Privileges	Non-Core Privileges	Additional Privileges	Special Privileges
Definition	Fundamental procedures and activities expected of a practitioner in a specific specialty.	Procedures requiring specialized training or experience beyond core privileges	Privileges are granted based on additional training or experience, not necessarily core or special.	Privileges granted to practitioners in a specific subspecialty
Education Requirements	Standard education and training for the specialty.	Requires specialized training or experience	Requires specialized training or experience	Requires specialized training or experience
Criteria for Granting Privilege	Eligible to apply based on medical/clinical license	Eligible to apply based on medical/clinical license	Eligible to apply based on medical/clinical license	Eligible to apply based on medical/clinical license
	Based on the scope of the organization	based on the scope of the organization	based on the scope of the organization	based on the scope of the organization
	Facility environment	Facility environment	Facility environment	Facility environment
	Scope of Individual Service	Scope of Individual Service	Scope of Individual Service	Scope of Individual Service
Type of Procedure	Routine procedures, patient care, and diagnosis within the scope of practice	Complex procedures, advanced techniques, or specialized patient populations	Procedures that are not part of the core, non-core privilege	Procedures that are not part of the core, non-core, and additional privilege

4. Qatar Council for Healthcare Practitioners: Core and advanced privileges for different physician's specialties Policy Code. Policy for Core and Advanced Privileges for Physicians.pdf
5. Specialized Palliative Care Clinical Privileges - BC MQI. Specialized Palliative Care

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Privileging is not a one-time event. According to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services and The Joint Commission, core privileges must be modified[6].

According to AMN, Credentialing and privileging are formal, documented procedures that require adherence to each institution's, state's, and specialty's specific rules and regulations for granting admission and clinical privileges. They are essential to providing patients with the highest possible standards and levels of care[7].

Healthcare facilities must continuously evolve in privilege-specific expertise and monitor and re-evaluate providers' performance to show they maintain the necessary skills and competence. However, reclassifying non-core privileges into core privileges, with adequate justification or oversight, can significantly benefit patient safety and organizational efficiency.

This study is significant as it highlights the critical balance that healthcare organizations must achieve between patient safety and operation efficiency when reclassifying clinical privileges.

2. Literature Review

International healthcare accreditation standards including JCI, WHO, ACI, NABH, GAHAR- etc. WHO has integrated the concept of privileges into its standards[8] and requires a structured delineation of the clinical privilege process for medical staff. However, JCI emphasizes that there is no one best way to delineate those clinical activities the new medical staff member is privileged to perform. Within each specialty area, the process of privilege delineation is uniform; however, this process may not be the same in all specialty areas[9].

These organizations underscore the critical importance of implementing a privileged process to enhance patient safety, ensure the quality of care, maintain accountability, comply with legal and regulatory frameworks, and manage risk effectively. The organization uses an ongoing standardized process to evaluate the quality and safety of patient care provided by each medical staff member. The ongoing professional practice evaluation includes the process of ongoing data collection to assess a practitioner's clinical competence and professional behavior. The information gathered during this process is factored into decisions to maintain, revise, or revoke existing privilege(s) before or at the end of the renewal decision[10].

The process for credentialing and privileging medical professionals permitted to provide patient care without supervision[11]. Healthcare institutions routinely review these privileges to align with best clinical practices and to meet regulatory and accreditation mandates.

Privilege reclassification represents a strategic method for restructuring clinical privileges within healthcare systems. This restructuring is defined as a driving factor to achieve positive results and enhance organizational performance.

Additionally, potentially leads to streamlined workflows, improved patient access, and quality of care. However, this approach also introduces inherent risks that, if not meticulously managed, may jeopardize patient safety and organizational efficiency.

Reclassifying non-core privileges into core privileges is a strategic decision that can have far-reaching consequences.

This literature reviews the complex factors that drive the reclassification of non-core privileges into core privileges, including:

Factors Driving Privilege Classifications

Considering the various driving factors and recognizing the multifaceted nature of clinical privilege reclassification, it is essential to acknowledge that this process can profoundly influence the delivery of healthcare services.

Strategic Planning Technique Tools Application
Strategic planning techniques are tools and frameworks used to help organizations develop and implement effective strategies to achieve their long-term team goals. To gain a comprehensive understanding of its implications, the internal

stakeholder groups of the management team, department heads, team leaders, and employees are involved in group and individual brainstorming sessions. The internal data sources, a sample size of granted privileges, and the number of privileged staff supported this brainstorming session.

With the brainstorming sessions and internal data source and sample, a SWOT analysis is conducted to identify potential strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to the reclassification process, aiming to illuminate the current position of the process, its benefits, and the challenges it presents for healthcare professionals and patients alike. This is used in the preliminary stage of decision-making processes to identify internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieving goals[12]. Once the SWOT factors have been identified, it is prioritized based on their importance and potential impact.

By conducting a SWOT analysis, we ensure that your reclassification process is a well-planned, efficient, and secure success.

- Identify Key Factors: Understand the key internal and external factors that will influence the reclassification process.
- Develop Effective Strategies: Develop strategies to leverage strengths, mitigate weaknesses, capitalize on opportunities, and address threats.
- Make Informed Decisions: Make informed decisions about the best approach to reclassifying the privilege process.
- Increase the Likelihood of Success: Increase the likelihood of a successful reclassification by addressing potential challenges and maximizing opportunities.

Strengths
- Improved Patient Safety
- Enhanced Quality of care
- Increased Accountability
- Organizational Efficiency
- Fairness and Equity

Weakness
- Administrative Burden
- Potential for Disruption
- Resistance to Change
- Complexity of the Process

Opportunities
- Enhanced Professional Development
- Streamline clinical practices
- Improved Collaboration
- Increased Flexibility
- Increased Provider Satisfaction
- Enhance Organizational Reputation

Threats
- Patient Safety Risk
- Legal and Regulatory Risks
- Reduced Provider Morale
- Organizational Reputation

Strengths

- **Improved Patient Care and Safety:** Reclassifying healthcare providers ensures that everyone has the appropriate privileges aligned with their skills and qualifications. This proactive approach significantly reduces the likelihood of medical errors, thereby fostering a safer environment for patients.
- **Enhanced Quality of Care:** When healthcare providers are matched with privileges that accurately reflect their expertise and experience, the overall quality of patient care is elevated. This tailored alignment enables providers to deliver specialized, effective treatments, ultimately benefiting patient outcomes.
- **Increased Accountability:** Clearly defined privileges serve as a foundation for accountability within healthcare teams. By establishing specific roles and responsibilities, providers are held accountable for their actions and decisions, cultivating a culture of responsibility that enhances patient safety.
- **Organization Efficiency:** Implementing a well-structured reclassification process streamlines operations within healthcare organizations. This efficiency can significantly accelerate the delivery of services, ensuring that patients receive timely access to the care they require. Additionally, it can lead to reduced staffing costs, increased revenue generation, and improved overall operational performance.
- **Fairness and Equity:** A thoughtfully designed reclassification framework promotes fairness and equity among healthcare providers. By ensuring that privileges

are allocated based on competence and experience, this process fosters an environment where all providers have equal opportunities to contribute meaningfully to patient care.

Weaknesses

- **Administrative Burden:** The process of reclassifying privileges in a healthcare setting can be quite laborious and demanding on resources. It often requires a considerable amount of administrative effort, which can strain staff and divert attention away from other critical tasks.
- **Potential for Disruption:** Adjustments to privilege levels can significantly impact clinical workflows, leading to temporary disruptions that may compromise the quality of patient care. During the transition period, healthcare providers must adapt to new processes, which can result in confusion and delays in service delivery.
- **Resistance to Change:** Healthcare professionals might exhibit reluctance or even opposition toward changes in their privileges, particularly if they feel that such alterations are unwarranted or disadvantageous. This resistance can stem from a fear of losing responsibilities or a belief that the changes undermine their expertise and contributions.
- **Complexity of the Process:** The reclassification of privileges is rarely a straightforward task. It typically involves numerous stakeholders- including administrators, medical staff, and committees each with their interests and priorities. This intricate web of

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decision-making can lead to protracted timelines, potential miscommunications, and an increased risk of errors in the implementation of new privilege structures.

Opportunities

- **Enhanced Professional Development:** Reclassification presents an invaluable opportunity for healthcare providers to expand their skill sets, acquire new competencies, and take significant steps forward in their professional journeys. Through targeted training and development initiatives, individuals can prepare themselves for advanced roles and responsibilities within the healthcare landscape.
- **Streamlined Clinical Practices:** The reclassification process plays a crucial role in standardizing clinical practices across the organization. By establishing clear guidelines and protocols, this initiative enhances the overall efficiency of operations, allowing healthcare professionals to deliver more consistent and effective patient care.
- **Improved Collaboration:** A well-defined understanding of privileges associated with reclassification fosters an environment of collaboration among healthcare providers. This clarity in roles not only strengthens teamwork but also promotes an integrated approach to patient care, ensuring that all team members contribute effectively to optimal health outcomes.
- **Increased Flexibility:** Reclassification paves the way for the creation of versatile staffing models that can adapt to the fluctuating demands of healthcare delivery. By optimizing the allocation of resources and leveraging the unique abilities of each provider, organizations can enhance their responsiveness to patient needs and operational challenges.
- **Enhanced Provider Satisfaction:** The adjustments brought about by the reclassification process can significantly improve job satisfaction among healthcare professionals. As they gain new opportunities for growth and experience a more supportive work environment, providers are likely to feel more fulfilled and engaged in their roles.
- **Enhanced Organizational Reputation:** A carefully managed reclassification process not only improves internal operations but also enhances the organization's reputation in the wider healthcare community. By demonstrating a commitment to quality care and patient safety, organizations can build trust with patients and stakeholders alike, reinforcing their standing as leaders in the field.

Threats

- **Legal and Regulatory Risks:** Organizations that fail to comply with regulatory requirements concerning clinical privileges may face significant legal challenges and financial penalties. This non-compliance not only tarnishes reputation but also poses serious operational risks
- **Patient Safety Risks:** Ineffectively executed reclassification processes can jeopardize patient safety. When clinicians are not granted appropriate privileges or are reassigned improperly, it can lead to inadequate care or mismanagement of patient needs.

- **Reduced Provider Morale:** The experience surrounding the reclassification process can profoundly affect healthcare providers' morale. A poorly managed transition can lead to frustration, dissatisfaction, and a general decline in job fulfillment, ultimately impacting the quality of care delivered.
- **Increased Liability:** Modifications to clinical privileges can heighten the organization's risk of liability. If the reclassification process is perceived as flawed or if it results in inadequate care, the organization may become vulnerable to lawsuits and claims related to malpractice or negligence.

Mitigate the Weaknesses and Threats for Successful Clinical Privilege Reclassification:
To minimize the Weaknesses and Threats and maximize the success of privilege reclassification, healthcare institutions should implement robust safeguards:

Rigorous Credentialing and Privileging Processes:
- Thorough review of provider qualifications, experience, and training
- Verification of certifications and licensure
- Assessment of current practice patterns and performance data

Ongoing Monitoring and Evaluation:
- Conduct regular competency assessment
- Regular review of provider performance, including adverse event reports and quality metrics
- Timely identification and remediation of any performance deficiencies
- Continuous evaluation of the impact of privilege changes on patient outcomes and organizational efficiency
- Implement continuous monitoring and incident response plans to detect and respond to security threats promptly.

Transparent Communication:
- Clear communication with providers regarding the rationale for privilege changes
- Open dialogue with medical staff and administration to address concerns and questions
- Transparent communication with patients about provider qualifications and the scope of their practice

Robust Reporting Systems:
- Encouraging a culture of reporting, where concerns about provider competence or patient safety can be raised without fear of retaliation
- Prompt investigation of reported incidents and appropriate corrective actions

Independent Peer Review:
- Periodic review of provider privileges by independent peer committees to ensure objectivity and accountability

Educational and Training Programs:
- Providing adequate training and education to ensure that providers are competent to perform new procedures and responsibilities

Regular Audits and Compliance Monitoring:
- Conducting regular audits to assess compliance with credentialing, privileging, and performance standards

- Monitoring adherence to regulatory requirements and institutional policies
- Ensure previously approved privilege availability for audit and verification
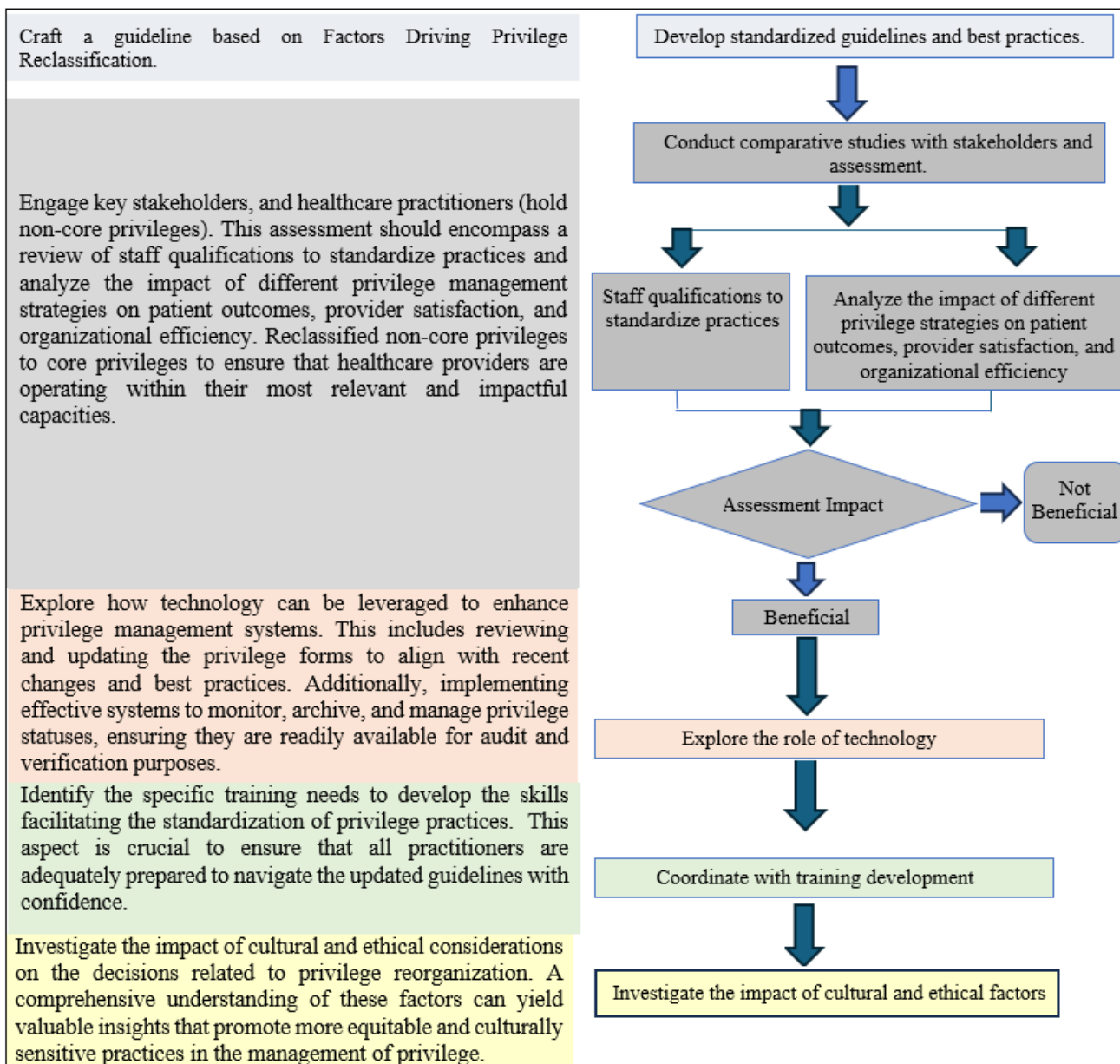
By focusing on these comprehensive steps, the organization can ensure a robust reclassification process that enhances overall healthcare delivery and fosters a culture of continuous improvement.

3. Way Forward

The reclassification of non-core privileges into core privileges is a pivotal step in optimizing healthcare delivery. By implementing a structured, evidence-based approach, organizations can enhance patient safety, streamline operations, and foster provider satisfaction. This study underscores the importance of robust planning, strategic safeguards, and continuous evaluation to achieve a successful transition while balancing organizational and clinical priorities. To successfully navigate this process, healthcare organizations must carefully consider the driving factors, potential benefits, and associated risks. Key strategies to ensure a successful transition include:

1) Investigate the impact of cultural and ethical considerations on decisions related to privilege reorganization. A comprehensive understanding of these factors can promote more equitable and culturally sensitive practices in privilege management.
2) Coordinate with training development and explore the role of technology to ensure a robust reclassification process that enhances overall healthcare delivery and fosters a culture of continuous improvement.
3) Conduct a thorough SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis to identify key factors, develop effective strategies, make informed decisions, and increase the likelihood of a successful privilege reclassification process.

4) Carefully consider the potential benefits (improved patient safety, enhanced quality of care, increased accountability, organizational efficiency, fairness, and equity) as well as the potential risks (administrative burden, potential for disruption, resistance to change, complexity of the process) when reclassifying non-core privileges to core privileges.

5) Analyze the impact of different privilege management strategies on patient outcomes, provider satisfaction, and organizational efficiency to ensure a balanced approach between patient safety and organizational efficiency.

By prioritizing patient safety and balancing security needs with operational efficiency, healthcare organizations can effectively reorganize privileges and optimize their security posture.

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