



VIPPS Background Information

The Verified Internet Pharmacy Practice Sites™ program (VIPPS®), developed and administered by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy® (NABP®), enables consumers to access with confidence important information regarding the licensure, confidentiality, and practices of some of America's Internet pharmacies.

Introduced in February 1999, the voluntary VIPPS program is designed to accredit an online pharmacy that is able to appropriately dispense pharmaceuticals to the public, is licensed in good standing by state boards of pharmacy, has met a rigorous 19-point criteria review, and has successfully completed an on-site survey. VIPPS-accredited online pharmacies display the VIPPS Seal on their Web site's home page. By clicking on the VIPPS Seal hyperlink, visitors are able to access NABP's VIPPS Web site and instantly obtain information regarding the online pharmacy at www.nabp.net.

"The VIPPS seal on any online pharmacy Web site instantly assures a patient that they are receiving the best in online pharmacy care," says Rich Palombo, RPh. VIPPS instantly grants consumers access to very important information, such as how Internet pharmacies dispense medication, protect patient privacy, and ensure the quality and safety of the products and services patients receive."

To be considered for VIPPS accreditation, the online pharmacy first completes the VIPPS Application, which can be downloaded from the NABP Web site. This application requests such information as the name under which the applicant is doing business, ownership, the applicant's addresses and telephone numbers, Web site addresses, the name of the pharmacist-in-charge, licensure, services provided, and documentation that verifies the applicant's adherence to the VIPPS criteria.

The online pharmacy must demonstrate compliance with a stringent set of criteria to qualify for VIPPS accreditation. Along with verification that the pharmacy is licensed in good standing by state boards, the VIPPS criteria includes questions in 19 Internet and practice-based areas, such as how the patient's or caregiver's identity is verified; patient medication consultation; the steps that are taken to ensure the patient's confidentiality; how medications are dispensed; and how controlled substance medications are secured and tracked when shipped to the patient. It is the criteria, and how they were developed, that sets the VIPPS program apart.

"I think the process we've designed for the VIPPS program criteria is exceptional. We worked hard to ensure an open and inclusive development," says Palombo. "To reach our goals and have great success with the program, we invited other organizations to share input on the criteria, including federal agencies, AARP, and the American Medical Association."

Once the application and supporting documentation has been received by NABP, staff begins the verification and evaluation process. An important part of the verification process is the site visit conducted by one or more surveyors. The trained VIPPS surveyor(s) will survey the applicant's

pharmacy and review and verify the applicant's policies and procedures that implement the VIPPS criteria.

“NABP performed a survey of Internet sites in which we found many online pharmacies that claimed they were authorized to ship medications to all 50 states, but were not appropriately licensed,” notes Palombo. “NABP’s stringent verification of licensure by the state boards of pharmacy assures patients that if there is a concern with an online pharmacy, the patients’ interests are protected and represented by the appropriate state board.”

It is only after successfully completing this application, verification, and site visit process that the online pharmacy is awarded VIPPS accreditation. Once an online pharmacy becomes accredited, an annual review and reaccreditation process will be conducted. Random site visits are projected for one-third of the VIPPS-accredited pharmacies each year, with all pharmacies being visited once every three years to ensure they continue to meet the VIPPS criteria.

“The VIPPS program is uniquely designed compared to other accreditation programs in that no other program addresses the same criteria or thoroughly covers as many areas,” says Palombo. “VIPPS criteria is defined by regulators, consumers, and by online pharmacies themselves. Online pharmacies are accredited based upon licensure verification, continuous assessment for compliance, and on-site surveys.”



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