

# The Joint Commission is Onsite

Ensuring Vendor Credentialing Compliance  
During a Joint Commission Survey



In healthcare compliance, it's impossible that you haven't heard – or been part of – the stories of what can happen when The Joint Commission comes onsite. Still, knowing how to be prepared for a visit from The Joint Commission can feel nebulous, scary and stressful. This guide will help you understand the purpose of The Joint Commission, and how to handle a visit so that it's more successful than scary for you and your staff.



The Joint Commission is an independent, not-for-profit organization that accredits and certifies over 22,000 healthcare organizations and programs in the United States.



The majority of hospitals in the United States are currently accredited by The Joint Commission<sup>1</sup>.

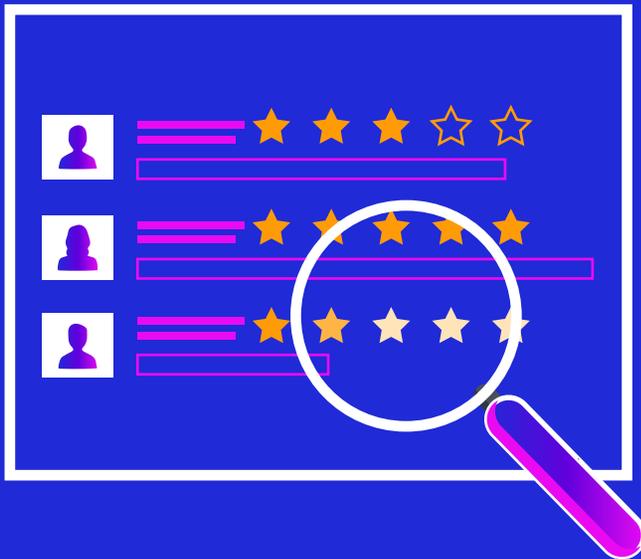
## What is The Joint Commission?

The Joint Commission focuses on patient safety and quality of care, providing hospital accreditation standards that address everything from patient rights and education, infection control, medication management, and preventing medical errors, to how the hospital validates that its doctors, nurses, and other staff are competent and qualified, how it prepares for emergencies, and how it collects performance data and then uses that data to drive continuous improvement.

The Joint Commission's focus on high quality care and patient safety aligns with the goals of healthcare organizations, which pursue accreditation for a variety of reasons, including to:

- Strengthen consumer confidence in the quality of care at their organization, which could provide a competitive edge
- Qualify for Medicare and Medicaid certification without undergoing a separate government quality inspection
- Mitigate risk by adopting The Joint Commission's performance improvement strategies around quality of care and patient safety, which can in turn reduce liability insurance costs
- Enhance staff recruitment, retention and development efforts since Joint Commission accreditation can attract qualified personnel, especially since accredited organizations provide additional opportunities for staff to develop their skills and knowledge

## How often can you expect The Joint Commission to swing by?



Joint Commission surveyors visit accredited health care organizations at least once every 39 months (every two years for laboratories) to evaluate compliance with standards. These visits, or surveys, are unannounced. During the survey, surveyors randomly select patients and use their medical records as a tracer to follow a patient through their entire stay. These tracers serve as a roadmap to evaluate standards compliance. As surveyors follow a patient's experience in a healthcare organization, they talk to and observe the doctors, nurses, and other staff who interact with the patient. Surveyors often speak to the patients as well.

Joint Commission accreditation goes much deeper than the on-site survey. It is a continuous process that promotes a culture of excellence. With a focus on ongoing improvements, Joint Commission accreditation is an integral part of a healthcare organization's operations. Throughout the accreditation cycle, organizations are provided with a self-assessment scoring tool to help monitor their ongoing standards compliance. Every three months, hospitals submit data to the Joint Commission about how they treat conditions such as heart attack care and pneumonia. That data that is available to the public and updated quarterly on [www.qualitycheck.org](http://www.qualitycheck.org).

# 5 strategies to make sure your vendor credentialing practices meet Joint Commission standards during a survey

## 1. Identify & validate

Have your coordinator confirm that this really is the validation team by accessing your extranet site on the Joint Commission website. Compare the names and photos of your surveyors online to the people standing in front of you.

## 2. Be a good host

It's helpful to keep in mind that the surveyors are your guests. Have your liaison set them up with a secure workspace that has internet connectivity and provide them with water and snacks. Keep them comfortable during their visit.

## 3. Alert your team

Be sure that everybody in your organization who needs to know is aware that the survey team is there, including all clinical and administrative staff. An orientation session and meeting will take place as soon as the surveyors are set up. This session gives them a chance to meet senior leadership, decision makers and some physicians.

## 4. Be prepared to explain who's onsite and why, and be able to show their relevant credentials

The Joint Commission's standards that are relevant to vendor, contractor and other types of non-employee credentialing are the same as those that apply to anyone who is entering a facility. Specifically, accredited health care organizations need to:

- Be aware of who is entering their facility, why they are there and what they are doing (EC.02.01.01)
- Have processes and policies in place to ensure that patient rights are respected, including communication, dignity, personal privacy (RI.01.01.01), and privacy of health information (IM.02.01.01)
- Have infection control precautions implemented (IC.02.01.01)
- Address the qualifications (HR.01.0.01) competency (HR.01.06.01) and performance (HR.01.07.01) of any non-employees brought into the organization who have a direct impact on patient care

## 5. Debrief after

Identify what went well during the visit and what didn't. This is an opportunity to evaluate where you need to strengthen policies or reporting. The best time to have this discussion is soon after the survey ends so that any necessary changes can be made while the information is still top of mind.

## The technology supports vendor credentialing compliance

An automated vendor credentialing solution provides easy access to analytics and dashboards that can quickly demonstrate compliance with The Joint Commission's standards for onsite vendors. Dashboards can help demonstrate to the surveyors that the organization is operating effectively.

In the symplr system, using the Credential Dashboard provides visibility to each individual access level, what the requirements are, as well as the status for each credential for every vendor rep. All vendor activities are automatically and immediately recorded for quick access to real-time data showing the compliance as it occurs.

The Visit History gives users complete visibility of credentialing data and compliance status across all credentialed populations. You can quickly see who has visited the health system and sort that based on date, department, name, and level. This is especially helpful in instances when users need to determine which vendors were onsite during a specific time period.

Ultimately, you want to have easy access to reports and dashboards that tell the story of your vendor compliance program so surveyors can easily confirm that your organization is meeting the standards for tracking each vendor's presence onsite, confirming the protection of patient safety and privacy and proving competency and performance.

## Key takeaways to keep your vendor program aligned with Joint Commission standards

- Keep in mind that The Joint Commission is focused on patient (and staff) safety, and that has an impact on how onsite vendors need to be tracked and managed.
- Use vendor credentialing technology tools to help provide the surveyors with the information they need about which vendors are onsite, why they are there and what credentials they have.
- Remember that Joint Commission accreditation goes beyond the surveys. It's an opportunity to enhance your healthcare organization's ongoing improvement efforts focused on delivering high quality patient care.

1. [https://www.jointcommission.org/facts\\_about\\_hospital\\_accreditation/](https://www.jointcommission.org/facts_about_hospital_accreditation/)



## About symplr

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For over 30 years, our customers trust our expertise and depend on our provider data management, workforce and talent management, contract management, spend management, access management, and compliance, quality, safety solutions to help drive better operations for better outcomes.

As your trusted guide, we follow a proven approach to help you achieve your organization's priority outcomes by breaking down silos, optimizing processes, and improving operational systems.

Learn how at [www.symplr.com](http://www.symplr.com).

