



WHAT IS THE WASHINGTON MEDICAL COMMISSION?

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The Washington Medical Commission (WMC) was established to safeguard the public and advance the quality of health services provided in Washington State. Among other things, the WMC regulates, investigates, and disciplines physicians.

What is the WMC's Purpose?

As stated, the WMC's primary purpose is to protect patients and ensure physicians and surgeons are providing competent care. The Commission is made up of 21 members who are appointed by the Governor, as well as additional members chosen by the Executive Director of the WMC. In total, there are 13 allopathic physicians, six public members, and two physician assistants who make up the members appointed by the Governor.¹ Additionally, ten physician members represent congressional districts.

The members promote patient safety and oversee licensing, education, and discipline associated with the doctors in the State. One facet of this mission involves fielding complaints made against doctors by patients, health care facilities, and patients' families, among others. The WMC is also responsible for issuing disciplinary actions if they determine a complaint is founded.

¹ WMC Members. <https://wmc.wa.gov/medical-commission-members#:~:text=The%20WMC%20is%20made%20up%20of%2013%20allopathic,States%20and%20m ust%20be%20residents%20of%20Washington%20State.>



This sounds mutually advantageous for health care facilities, doctors, and patients, but what happens when lines are blurred or facts are misrepresented? Attorney Athan Papailiou regularly represents clients in professional liability, regulatory compliance, and disciplinary hearing matters. He has the knowledge and experience to fight for physicians' rights.

How Does the WMC Process Complaints?

The WMC receives complaints online via their website or through the mail. Once submitted, the WMC has 21 days to decide whether or not to move forward with the complaint, i.e., after reviewing each complaint, the Commission will either decide to close it or initiate an investigation. When processing complaints, the WMC follows Washington's Uniform Disciplinary Act (UDA), which establishes the rules for oversight of health care professionals.² The UDA outlines the various state laws that the WMC seeks to uphold.

What Is a WMC Investigation?

When the WMC launches an investigation against a health care provider, it is usually due to alleged acts of repeated or extreme negligence or ethical violations. The WMC investigatory team conducts hundreds of investigations every year, and each member of this team is trained to understand clinical procedures and standards of care. While each investigator is touted as being

² See chapter 18.130 RCW (Uniform Disciplinary Act)
<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=18.130&full=true>

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unbiased and neutral, that doesn't mean the truth always prevails. You can increase your chances of a fair and accurate consideration of your case by working with Athan Law.

Violations of the UDA are taken seriously by the WMC, as they should be. There should be consequences for, and ways to identify, medical practitioners who perform illegal, dangerous, or negligent acts and endanger patient safety. However, in an effort to locate legitimate offenders, sometimes innocent ones get mixed up in the system. Securing legal counsel to defend you can protect your licensure and professional livelihood and prevent other serious punitive action.

What Kind of Penalties Can the WMC Impose?

The WMC does have the authority to penalize physicians after a complaint is found to be warranted, but their powers are not all-encompassing. Specifically, they can:

- Deny license applications;
- Issue subpoenas;
- Place conditions on medical licenses; and
- Suspend or revoke licenses.

In the event that an action is deemed necessary after an investigation, the WMC can choose the appropriate penalty. If you are concerned about the results of an investigation against you or have questions about any part of

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this process, Athan Law can advise you on the next steps and possible outcomes.

What is Compliance Monitoring?

If the WMC authorizes your case for further action after an investigation is complete, you will likely be required to enter their Compliance Monitoring Program.³ This Program is meant to assure that the surgeon or physician who has received disciplinary action is complying with their ordered sanctions or requirements. The first step in this stage is usually to attend an orientation meeting where the expectations should be clearly stated. There is often a recurring or continual element to the Compliance Monitoring Program as many doctors who are ordered to participate are also required to make an annual appearance for a set number of years.

Attorney Athan Papailiou advocates for medical professionals during challenging reviews and investigations. If you are looking for representation in connection with an investigation by the WMC or charges issued by the WMC, call us at (509) 215-4679.

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³ WMC. Compliance Monitoring Program. <https://wmc.wa.gov/complaints-actions/compliance-monitoring-program>

