

Bylaws vs. Policies & Procedures vs. Rules & Regulations

Bylaws (The Constitution)

- Foundation of medical staff governance.
- Define structure, membership, rights, responsibilities.
- Must comply with laws, accreditation standards, and CMS CoPs.
- Changes require medical staff vote and governing body approval.

Example: "Membership shall be limited to licensed physicians, dentists, and podiatrists."

Policies & Procedures (The Guidelines & How-Tos)

- Policies = what/why (principles & intentions).
- Procedures = how (step-by-step instructions).
- Guide daily practice; easier to update than bylaws.

Example: "Policy: Hospital is committed to patient safety. Procedure: Adverse events must be reported within 24 hours."

Rules & Regulations (The Do's and Don'ts)

- Operational details that support bylaws.
- Set specific expectations of conduct and practice.
- Enforceable standards.

Example: "Operative reports must be completed within 24 hours of surgery."

Comparison Table

Category	Bylaws (Constitution)	Policies & Procedures (Guidelines/How-Tos)	Rules & Regulations (Do's & Don'ts)
Purpose	Foundation & structure	Guidance and processes	Specific expectations & conduct
Level	Broad, high-level	Detailed but flexible	Detailed, enforceable
Changes Require	Vote of medical staff + governing body approval	Administrative approval	Medical staff approval (usually MEC)
Example	Defines membership eligibility	Describes credentialing process	Dictates timely record completion

✓ Easy Way to Remember

- Bylaws = Constitution (foundation, who we are)
- Policies/Procedures = Roadmap (how we operate)
- Rules/Regulations = Law & Order (do's and don'ts)