

Focused Practice Designation FAQs

Updated March 2019

Why was the focused practice designation established?

The focused practice designation, approved by ABMS in March 2017, recognizes the value that physicians who devote a substantial portion of their practice to a specific area of a specialty and/or subspecialty can provide to improving health care. It reflects an evolution of practice that occurs following initial certification and is relevant to continuing certification. For example, a physician may focus his or her practice on work in the hospital setting or concentrate on specific patient populations, conditions, and/or specialized procedures that emerge as medicine evolves.

What does focused practice designation mean for the Member Boards and certification?

Focused practice designation enables Member Boards to set standards for, assess, and acknowledge additional expertise that physicians gain through clinical experience. It allows physicians to concentrate their continuing certification efforts in the very area on which much of their professional practice is based.

Which Member Boards have approved focused practice designation?

The following table summarizes the boards with approved focused practice designations.

ABMS Member Board	Focused Practice Designation
Emergency Medicine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advanced Emergency Medicine Ultrasonography
Family Medicine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hospital Medicine
Internal Medicine	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hospital Medicine
Neurological Surgery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Nervous System Endovascular Surgery Pediatric Neurological Surgery Neurological Critical Care
Obstetrics and Gynecology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology
Pathology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clinical Chemistry Clinical Microbiology
Psychiatry and Neurology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Nervous System Endovascular Surgery
Radiology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Nervous System Endovascular Surgery

What is the approval process for the Member Boards to offer focused practice designation?

ABMS Member Boards can propose areas for focused practice designation to ABMS that align with the standards for certification and continuing certification. Proposals outline the eligibility criteria, clinical practice experience (patients treated/procedures performed), and assessment process for continuing certification that eligible physicians complete for focused practice designation. The proposal goes through a review and approval process similar to the one used for a new specialty or subspecialty.

What is the process for physicians to gain focused practice designation?

Physicians already certified in an established, approved specialty or subspecialty may apply to those boards with an approved focused practice designation. Among other requirements, physicians must meet specific criteria including the length of time they have focused in the particular area, as well as the number of patients they have treated or procedures they have performed.

What is the process for physicians to maintain focused practice designation?

Physicians can maintain their designation by meeting the clinical practice requirements for the specified area of focused practice and the requirements for maintaining their certification. Requirements related to the focused practice designation also may count toward the requirements to maintain primary specialty or subspecialty certification.

Can a physician lose their certification if they do not meet focused practice requirements?

No. Because focused practice is an added designation to a certification, additional program requirements must be met. This includes continuing to meet the clinical practice requirements for the specified area. Only the designation lapses if the focused practice requirements are not met. Physicians can re-enter the focused practice program at a later date by meeting the Member Board's requirements, including keeping their primary specialty or subspecialty certificate up to date.

Is the focused practice designation displayed in ABMS Board Certification Credentials Profile?

Yes. Physicians involved in focused practice will have that designation shown as part of their active certification on the ABMS Board Certification Credentials Profile.

What is the difference between subspecialty certification and focused practice designation?

Subspecialty certification relates to the body of knowledge or technique in a component of a specialty or subspecialty. It requires physicians to complete additional training and pass an assessment given by an ABMS Member Board. Focused practice is an added designation to a certification recognizing additional expertise or focus gained through clinical experience. Physicians must maintain an active certification in their specialty/subspecialty. See the summary table on the next page.

Summary of the differences between subspecialty certification and focused practice designation

	Subspecialty Certification	Focused Practice Designation
Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The status granted by a Member Board to a physician for successfully completing and maintaining the Member Board requirements for the subspecialty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The designation granted by a Member Board to a physician who demonstrates additional expertise and continued focus in a particular area of a specialty or subspecialty
Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes a physician's demonstration of additional competency within a specialty related to a distinct and definable patient population, a particular type of care need, a "stand alone" body of medical knowledge or unique care principles solely to meet the needs of a patient population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes a physician's work in a specific area of a specialty or subspecialty where he or she devotes a substantive portion of practice. This could include new or evolving limited areas of practice or procedures
Eligibility	Initial certification in a subspecialty requires physicians to have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current unrestricted license Certification in a specialty of a Member Board Additional ACGME accredited fellowship training and assessment 	Focused practice designation requires physicians to have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active specialty/subspecialty certificate Completed clinical experience as defined by the Member Board, which may include non-accredited training
Board Assessment	Initial Certification Examination and other assessment(s) as defined by the Board	Board-based assessment
Continuing Certification (MOC)	Board-specified; covering range of the subspecialty	Board-specified; includes maintaining the specialty/subspecialty certification. Specific activities may be tailored to area of focused practice
Reporting	Reported as a subspecialty certificate	Reported as a designation of focused practice
Co-sponsorship	Scope of practice does not vary based on specialty of physician	Scope of practice may vary based on specialty or subspecialty certification