

Focused Practice Designation FAQs

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1. What does a focused practice designation mean?

The focused practice designation recognizes the value that physicians who devote a substantial portion of their practice to a specific area of a specialty and/or subspecialty can bring to improving patient care. For example, a physician certified in internal medicine may choose to focus their practice on work in the hospital setting. Physicians also may choose to focus their practice for specific patient populations, conditions, and/or specialized procedures that emerge as medicine evolves.

2. Why was the Focused Practice Designation established by ABMS?

The Focused Practice Designation, approved by ABMS in March 2017, provides an opportunity for Member Boards to set standards for, assess, and recognize areas of additional expertise that physicians acquire through their practice in a particular area of a specialty and/or subspecialty. The designation serves as an additional indication of a physician's commitment to providing high quality care for patients' specific health needs.

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

Subspecialty certification relates to a particular 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 board.

The Focused Practice Designation provides recognition for physicians' additional expertise or focus in a particular area of a specialty and/or subspecialty. Physicians seeking this designation must maintain active certification within their specialty or subspecialty. There is no formal training required for a recognized area of focused practice as physicians gain expertise through clinical experience. Formalized training currently available may meet some of the requirements for clinical experience and patient volume.

4. Which ABMS Member Boards have received approval from ABMS for a focused practice designation?

ABMS Member Board	Focused Practice Designation
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
Obstetrics and Gynecology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology
Pathology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clinical Chemistry Clinical Microbiology

5. What is the procedure for a ABMS Member Board to offer a 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 by the Committee on Certification (COCERT) similar to the one used for a new specialty or subspecialty. Once approved, the Member Board may offer the focused practice option to their physicians.

6. How do physicians gain focused practice recognition?

Approved areas of focused practice are offered by the particular Member Board. Physicians already certified in a specialty or subspecialty of the board may apply. Among other requirements, physicians seeking this designation must hold active certification within their specialty or subspecialty at the time of application and meet the continuing certification requirements of that certificate for the duration that the focused practice designation is held.

7. Does a focused practice designation have any effect on specialty or subspecialty certification status?

Focused practice is not intended to be a form of certification, since it defines or recognizes areas of additional experience or focus within recognized specialties or subspecialties. Rather, the designation reflects an evolution of practice that occurs following certification. Physicians must continue to keep their primary specialty or subspecialty certificate up to date. They can elect to maintain the designation as part of their continuing certification activities.

8. If the focused practice designation lapses, can a physician lose his or her board certification?

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. If those requirements are not met, the focused practice designation lapses. Physicians can re-enter the focused practice program at a later date by meeting the Member Board's requirements at that time. Certification requirements related to the focused practice designation also may count toward the requirements to maintain primary specialty or subspecialty certification.

9. Will the focused practice designation be included in the physician's ABMS profile?

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