

Focused Practice Designation FAQ

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Why was the focused practice designation established?

The focused practice designation, approved by ABMS in March 2017, recognizes the value that physicians who focus some or all of their practice within 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 the ABMS Member Boards to set standards for, assess, and acknowledge additional expertise that physicians gain through clinical experience, and may include formal training.

Which Member Boards have approved focused practice designations?

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"> Minimally Invasive Gynecologic Surgery 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
Surgery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Metabolic Bariatric 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), formal training, if required, 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 and the number of patients they have treated or procedures they have performed. Requirements also may include formal training.

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 focused practice designation displayed in the 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 a specific component of a specialty to which a practicing physician or medical specialist may devote a significant portion of time. Practice in the subspecialty follows special educational experience – an ACGME-accredited training program of at least one (1) year in duration – in addition to that required for general certification. Focused practice recognizes areas of practice within existing specialties and subspecialties that either evolve as diplomates progress throughout their professional careers or emerge as medicine changes due to advances in medical knowledge. These areas are more limited in scope than those covered by subspecialty designation or may be procedural but without the extensive scientific, clinical, and organizational underpinnings of a separate 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 an identifiable component of a specialty to which a practicing physician or medical specialist may devote a significant portion of time Incorporates specific and identifiable body of knowledge that may include certain procedural skills or practice modes but must not be limited only to training in a technical skill. Requires additional fellowship training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes areas of practice within existing specialties and subspecialties that either evolve as diplomates progress throughout their professional careers or emerge as medicine changes due to advances in medical knowledge, are more limited in scope than those covered by subspecialty designation or may be procedural but without the extensive scientific, clinical, and organizational underpinnings of a separate subspecialty. Expertise in these areas is gained through clinical experience and may include formal training.
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. At least one (1) year of ACGME-accredited fellowship training. 	Focused practice designation requires physicians to have: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Active specialty/subspecialty certificate. Meet continuing certification requirements. Expertise gained through clinical experience, which may include formal training.
Member Board Assessment	Initial certification examination and other assessment(s) as defined by the Member Board.	Member Board-based assessment.
Continuing Certification	Board-specified; covering range of the subspecialty.	Board-specified; may be tailored to area of focused practice; includes maintaining the specialty/subspecialty certification.
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.