



American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology, Inc.

A Member Board of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS)

Frequently Asked Questions from the Public

What is ABPN Certification?

Certification by the ABPN means that a psychiatrist or neurologist has demonstrated their expertise in the specialty of psychiatry or in neurology, and for subspecialists, their expertise in that subspecialty. Demonstrations of their expertise include independent assessments by the ABPN based on specialty-specific standards established by peer specialists in our fields.

ABPN-certified psychiatrists and neurologists are physicians who receive their medical degree after rigorous training at an accredited medical school, typically for at least four years of school after obtaining an undergraduate college bachelor's degree. After graduating medical school, they then must:

- Successfully complete an ACGME-accredited or ABPN-approved residency training program, which comprises extensive supervised experience taking care of patients while also receiving rigorous teaching in programs that are at least four years in length;
- Possess an unrestricted license to practice medicine in at least one state, commonwealth, territory, or possession of the U.S. or province of Canada; and
- Pass an ABPN certification examination, at which time they first become an ABPN 'board-certified' psychiatrist or neurologist.
- If they become a subspecialist in a subspecialty of psychiatry or neurology, they must successfully complete an ACGME-accredited fellowship training program in that subspecialty and then pass an ABPN certification examination in that subspecialty.
- Once in practice, to maintain their ABPN certification(s) psychiatrists and neurologists must:
 - fulfill ongoing requirements for Continuing Medical Education and other activities that ensure they are engaged in lifelong learning and continual self-improvement. These requirements ensure that physicians' understanding of their learning needs is informed by external feedback; and
 - pass an ABPN assessment on a regular basis, either ongoing short examinations based on articles from the medical literature, or a more comprehensive examination at least once every 10 years.

What is subspecialty certification?

Many physicians choose to specialize in a subspecialty or narrow field within a specialty. The ABPN certifies psychiatrists and neurologists in the following subspecialties:

- Addiction Psychiatry
- Brain Injury Medicine
- Child and Adolescent Psychiatry
- Clinical Neurophysiology
- Consultation-Liaison Psychiatry
- Epilepsy
- Forensic Psychiatry
- Geriatric Psychiatry
- Neurodevelopmental Disabilities
- Neuromuscular Medicine
- Pain Medicine
- Sleep Medicine
- Vascular Neurology

How can I determine if my doctor is board-certified?

The ABPN has developed a convenient way to find ABPN board-certified physicians in your area through the [ABPN verifyCERT®](#) Certification and Status Verification System. There are a few different search methods available including by name, specialty, and state/city.

The American Board of Medical Specialties (the umbrella organization for ABPN and other specialty boards) also provides a comprehensive website — [Certification Matters](#) — as a resource for the public to learn more about board certification. The ABMS site provides information about physicians' certification by other specialty boards in addition to the ABPN.

Is board certification the same as having a medical license?

No. Physicians are issued a medical license by their state after completing an accredited or approved training program. A medical license is required to practice medicine in the U.S. or Canada. However, a medical license does not say anything about a physician's specialty expertise. As well, specialty board certification is not required to practice medicine. Board-certified physicians choose to obtain and continue their certification.

Why is board certification important? How are board-certified psychiatrists and neurologists different from other clinicians?

As specialist physicians, psychiatrists and neurologists have undertaken extensive, rigorous training over many years (as described above), which gives them a deep and broad experience working with patients and families across the illnesses and conditions that make up their specialty. Board-certified psychiatrists and neurologists have gone further by demonstrating their specialty expertise, and their commitment to lifelong learning, to the satisfaction of the ABPN, an independent body comprised of experts in the fields. As such, board-certified psychiatrists and neurologist have uniquely demonstrated their qualifications to provide expert specialty and subspecialty care in their fields.

What is a Board-Certified Psychiatrist?

Psychiatrists are physicians with specialized expertise in evaluating and treating people with mental disorders. Mental disorders are conditions that affect people's thinking, feeling, and/or behaviors in ways that are distressing or cause difficulties in their lives. Many mental disorders are caused by other medical conditions affecting the brain or other parts of the body, although the precise cause of many common and important psychiatric disorders is not known. Nonetheless, there are effective treatments available for mental disorders. Board-certified psychiatrists have demonstrated their expertise in diagnosing and caring for people with these conditions.

Patients can be assured that an ABPN board-certified psychiatrist has specialized skills and knowledge to diagnose and treat problems ranging from emergencies to the long-term medical management of psychiatric disorders.

The conditions psychiatrists treat include disorders such as:

- Depressive disorders
- Anxiety disorders
- Addictions
- Psychoses
- Developmental disabilities
- Neurocognitive disorders, including dementia due to Alzheimer's disease
- Sexual dysfunctions
- Adjustment disorders

Psychiatrists can order diagnostic laboratory tests, prescribe medications, provide psychotherapy, evaluate and treat psychological and interpersonal problems, and give continuing care for psychiatric problems. Psychiatrists are also prepared to intervene with individuals and families who are experiencing a crisis or dealing with great stress. In addition to caring for patients directly, psychiatrists may act as consultants to primary care physicians or to other colleagues including non-physicians such as clinical psychologists, social workers, and nurses.

What is a Board-Certified Neurologist or Child Neurologist?

Neurologists are physicians with specialized expertise in evaluating and treating people with disorders of the nervous system, including the brain, spinal cord, peripheral nerves, and of muscles. Child neurologists are physicians with specialized expertise in evaluating and treating disorders of the nervous system in children, from newborns up through adolescence. Some of the conditions overlap with those seen by adult neurologists, and others are unique to this younger population.

Patients can be assured that an ABPN board-certified neurologist or child neurologist has specialized skills and knowledge to diagnose and treat specific problems and to provide medical management for a range of problems, including emergencies and long-term care of chronic neurological disorders.

Neurologists diagnose and treat disorders of the nervous system (brain, spinal cord, and peripheral nerves) and muscles. These disorders include:

- Stroke
- Brain and spinal cord tumors
- Muscular dystrophy
- Headache and other pain
- Meningitis
- Encephalitis
- Epilepsy (seizures)
- Parkinson's disease
- Alzheimer's disease and other memory disorders
- Multiple sclerosis
- Amyotrophic lateral sclerosis
- Concussion
- Effects of systemic diseases, like high blood pressure and diabetes, on the nervous system

Child neurologists diagnose and treat similar disorders in infants, children, and adolescents. They also have special competence in conditions such as:

- Genetic and metabolic problems
- Malformations of the nervous system
- Intellectual disability and other neurodevelopmental problems of childhood

In addition to caring for patients directly, neurologists and child neurologists may act as consultants to primary care physicians or other colleagues.

I would like to file a complaint about a psychiatrist or neurologist. Can ABPN assist with this?

No. Individuals who wish to file a complaint about a physician should contact their state medical board for more information. The Federation of State Medical Board website offers links to [state medical board websites](#).

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