

What Does it Mean to be Board Certified?

Certification of a physician by an ABMS Member Board means that the physician, awarded such a certificate, has successfully completed an approved educational and training program and a rigorous evaluation process designed to assess the knowledge, skills and experience necessary to provide quality patient care in that specialty. Upon graduation from medical school, physicians who voluntarily wish to become certified as specialists by an ABMS Member Board, enter a residency training program approved by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), an organization responsible for setting and evaluating standards for the majority of graduate medical education in the United States. Depending upon the specialty, these programs require from 3 to 7 years of training after the completion of medical school. Upon successful completion of such a training program and for some boards, a period of independent practice following the training program, a candidate for certification must submit his/her credentials to the appropriate ABMS board from which they desire certification. These credentials are carefully reviewed and a judgment made as to whether or not the individual met the requirements of the certifying board and will be allowed to sit for the examination(s) of the board. If the candidate successfully passes the examination(s), he/she is granted certification in one of 36 general areas of medical practice, by one of the 24 Member Boards of the ABMS (<http://www.abms.org/approved.asp>). All certificates issued today by ABMS Member Boards are time limited, which varies from 6 to 10 years depending on the particular board. Time limited certificates require the specialist to re-certify to maintain his/her certification several times during the course of a professional career.

In some instances, board certified specialists of one of the ABMS Member Boards, desire further training in order to become certified as sub-specialists by their primary board or a closely related board. Generally such training follows the period of primary specialty training discussed above and requires an additional 1-2 years of education and training. The ACGME or the primary specialty board approves sub-specialty training programs. The certification process for sub-specialists is very similar to that described for specialists and equally rigorous. Sub-specialty certification is likewise time limited and requires re-certification during the course of one's professional career. The 24 Member Boards of the ABMS award sub-specialty certificates in 88 different areas of medical practice. (<http://www.abms.org/approved.asp>)

It is possible to use the Who's Certified section of the ABMS website to conduct a search by specialty or sub-specialty. Type in the name of the specialty or sub-specialty or use the drop down menu of specialties provided and the state in which you hope to find a specialist or sub-specialist. All of the individuals certified by an ABMS Member Board in that specialty or subspecialty within the state identified will appear on one or several screens for you to review.