



**American Board  
of Medical Specialties**

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## **NEWS RELEASE**

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### **ABMS Announces Progressive Leave Policy for Residents and Fellows**

*Policy Will Offer Trainees More Flexibility, Reduce Stress, and  
Increase Autonomy in Making Life Decisions*

**CHICAGO – July 13, 2020**—The American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS), the leading not-for-profit organization that oversees physician certification in the United States, announced the adoption of a [progressive leave policy](#) that will offer residents and fellows more flexibility, reduce stress, and increase autonomy in making life decisions, especially with regard to family and parental leave.

Starting in July 2021, all [ABMS Member Boards](#) with training programs of two or more years duration will allow for a minimum of six weeks away once during training for purposes of parental, caregiver, and medical leave, without exhausting time allowed for vacation or sick leave and without requiring an extension in training. Member Boards must communicate when a leave of absence will require an official extension to help mitigate the negative impact on a physician's career trajectory that a training extension may have, such as delaying a fellowship or moving into a full, salaried position.

“The growing shifts in viewpoints regarding work-life balance and parental roles had a great influence in the creation of this policy which fosters an environment that supports our trainees’ ability to care not only for patients, but also for themselves and their families,” stated Richard E. Hawkins, MD, ABMS President and Chief Executive Officer. “Several ABMS Member Boards have already adopted policies ensuring residents and fellows have the flexibility to manage their training commitments ‘when life happens’ and not unduly delay achievement of board certification. All of our Member Boards will extend these opportunities to residents as they implement the new policy during the next year.”

The development of the new “ABMS Policy on Parental, Caregiver and Family Leave” was initiated following a report from the Accreditation Council on Graduate Medical Education’s (ACGME) Council of Review Committee Residents in June 2019. An ABMS Task Force on Parental Leave was established and included Jo Buyske, MD, President and Chief Executive Officer, American Board of Surgery (ABS) and Carolyn Kinney, MD, Executive Director, American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, both members of the ABMS Board of Directors Member; Nancy

Rose, MD, representing the American Board of Medical Genetics and Genomics; and Julius Hamilton, MD, a cardiothoracic anesthesiologist and a member of the ABMS Stakeholder Council. ABMS and ACGME co-sponsored a workshop on resident and fellow parental and family leave in early February 2020 that brought together more than 80 multidisciplinary stakeholders to explore this issue and make recommendations for improvement.

“It is gratifying to see the high level of engagement and commitment from ABMS Member Boards to address an issue that is so important to physicians in training,” said Dr. Kinney. “Through Member Boards’ compassionate and creative efforts, we see that it is possible to maintain high standards for physician training while preserving trainees’ physical and emotional well-being.”

The newly approved policy offers ABMS Member Boards the flexibility to create a parental, family or medical leave protocol that best suits the training required for their specialty and/or subspecialty. Examples of this tailored approach include the American Board of Anesthesiology’s (ABA) recent addition of 40 additional days (8 weeks) of absence from training over and above the existing 60 days absence permitted, subject to approval by the ABA, without extending training, and ABS’ six-year residency option, under which a resident may take up to 12 months leave during the training period if needed. The American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology allows a resident to take up to a total of 24 weeks (six months) of leave over the four years of residency, not to exceed 12 weeks in a single year.

Kristy Rialon, MD, one of the authors of the ACGME report, welcomes this change. “By virtue of their ages, residents and fellows—male and female—often find themselves having and raising children, as well as serving as family members’ caregivers,” said Dr. Rialon, Assistant Professor of Surgery at Baylor College of Medicine and the Texas Children’s Hospital. “By adopting more realistic and compassionate approaches, the ABMS Member Boards will significantly improve the quality of life for residents and fellows. This also will support our female physicians, helping to narrow the gender gap in their career advancement by allowing for greater leave flexibility.”

### **About ABMS**

Established in 1933, the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) is the leading not-for profit organization overseeing physician certification in the United States. ABMS supports 24 Member Boards that develop educational and professional standards and programs of assessment to certify physician specialists, all dedicated to improving the quality of care to the patients, families and communities they serve. More than 900,000 physicians are certified in one or more of 40 specialties and 87 subspecialties offered by the ABMS Member Boards. For more information about ABMS, visit [abms.org](http://abms.org) or call (312) 436-2600.

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