

From the ABNM: Adoption of Progressive Leave Policy for Residents and Fellows

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Starting in July 2021, all American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) member boards with training programs of 2 or more years duration will allow for a minimum of 6 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. In July 2020, the ABMS announced the adoption of a progressive leave policy offering all residents and fellows more flexibility and increased autonomy in making life decisions, especially regarding family and parental leave. Creating a policy that was more realistic and compassionate, the ABMS member boards believed it would improve quality of life for residents and fellows and support women physician trainees by allowing greater leave flexibility and (hopefully) help narrow the gender gap in career advancement. The new policy applies to all trainees in programs of 2 or more years duration and to eligibility for Initial Certification.

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 (ACGME) Council of Review Committee Residents in June 2019. An ABMS Task Force on Parental Leave was established, and ABMS and ACGME cosponsored 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. There was a high level of engagement from ABMS boards to address this important issue for physicians in training, and the new policy reflected the member boards' commitment to maintaining high standards for physician training while preserving trainees' physical and emotional well-being. The consensus from participants was that improving current leave policies was not only an appropriate but a necessary advancement to improve the training environment for residents and fellows.

The ABMS-approved policy offered all member boards, such as the American Board of Nuclear Medicine (ABNM), the flexibility to create a parental, family, or medical leave protocol that best suits the training required for each specialty. ABMS policy applies to training programs that are 2 years or longer, and so does not apply to nuclear medicine training programs of 12–16 months. Some examples are

international medical graduates who need 12 months of nuclear medicine training in the United States, radiologists in a 12-month nuclear radiology fellowship program, diagnostic radiology residents in a 16-month nuclear radiology pathway during residency, and radiologists in the American Board of Radiology alternate pathway. ABNM leave policy states that leave for any reason, such as vacation, illness, or family leave, may be taken as permitted by the local institution's graduate medical education office or equivalent, and/or applicable rules of the ACGME. In the absence of such rules, up to 6 weeks (30 working days) of leave are permitted per academic year. When nuclear medicine training is longer than 1 year, the average length of leave should not exceed 6 weeks per academic year. If leave exceeds these limits, as permitted or required by state or federal regulations, the program director must have a plan approved by the ABNM to compensate for lost educational time.

Many boards, as well as residents and fellows, were encouraged and relieved at the change in policy and believed it to be long overdue. By recognizing the importance of time away for birthing parents, non-birthing parents, adoptive/foster parents, and surrogates, the policy acknowledges that families come in different forms and that each parent plays a vital role in the development of a child.

Allowing greater leave flexibility for women physicians in training is a critical step toward gender equity in medicine. Many women have contended with the consequences of taking too much leave, including perceived burdens on co-residents, delayed graduation, lost fellowships, or inability to meet board certification requirements. These consequences have undoubtedly affected the career trajectory of women physicians, but the hope is that greater leave flexibility will not force someone to choose between having a child and career advancement.

Learn more about the new ABMS policy at: <https://www.abms.org/policies/parental-leave/> and about ABNM training requirements at: <https://www.abnm.org/index.php/exam/training-requirements/>.



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