

The American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AAPM&R) is the national medical specialty organization representing more than 10,000 physicians who are specialists in physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R).

What is Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation?

Physical medicine and rehabilitation, also known as physiatry or rehabilitation medicine, aims to enhance and restore functional ability and quality-of-life to those with physical impairments or disabilities affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons. Unlike other medical specialties that focus on a medical “cure,” the goals of the physiatrist are to maximize patients’ independence in activities of daily living and improve quality-of-life. Physiatrists are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans, and are integral members of the care team.

What is a Physiatrist?

PM&R physicians are medical doctors who have completed training in the specialty of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and may be subspecialty certified in Brain Injury Medicine, Hospice and Palliative Medicine, Neuromuscular Medicine, Pain Medicine, Pediatric Rehabilitation Medicine, Spinal Cord Injury Medicine, and/or Sports Medicine.



Specifically, PM&R physicians:

- ✔ Trained in musculoskeletal, neurological, rheumatological and cardiovascular systems
- ✔ Have broad medical expertise that allows them to diagnose and treat disabling conditions throughout a person’s lifetime, in patients of all ages
- ✔ Determine and lead the treatment/prevention plan to treat the whole person, not just the problem area
- ✔ Direct a team of medical professionals, which may include other physicians or physical therapists, occupational therapists, and physician extenders, to optimize care and restore function and quality of life for their patients

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

Depending on the injury, illness or disabling condition, some PM&R physicians may treat their patients using the following procedures/services:

- ✓ EMG/Nerve Conduction Studies
- ✓ Ultrasound guided procedures
- ✓ Fluoroscopy guided procedures
- ✓ Injections of the spine
- ✓ Discography, Disc Decompression and Vertebroplasty/Kyphoplasty
- ✓ Nerve Stimulators, Blocks and Ablation procedures—Peripheral and Spinal
- ✓ Injections of joints
- ✓ Prolotherapy
- ✓ Spasticity Treatment (Phenol and Botulinum toxin injections, intrathecal baclofen pump trial and implants)
- ✓ Nerve and Muscle Biopsy
- ✓ Manual Medicine/Osteopathic Treatment
- ✓ Prosthetics and Orthotics
- ✓ Complementary-alternative medicine (i.e., acupuncture, etc.)
- ✓ Disability/impairment assessment
- ✓ Medicolegal consulting



Practice Settings

PM&R physicians practice in a variety of clinical settings, including inpatient and outpatient facilities.

Some of the common diagnoses and populations seen by inpatient physiatrists include spinal cord injury, brain injury (traumatic and non-traumatic), stroke, multiple sclerosis, polio, burn care, and musculoskeletal and pediatric rehabilitation. Inpatient physiatrists lead collaborative care teams and work with social workers and other allied health therapists to manage these issues.

Outpatient physiatrists manage nonsurgical conditions including orthopaedic injuries, spine-related pain and dysfunction, occupational injuries and overuse syndromes, neurogenic bowel/bladder, pressure sore management, spasticity management, and chronic pain. Outpatient physiatrists are typically found in multidisciplinary groups with other physiatrists, orthopaedic surgeons and/or neurosurgeons.

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