

Physiatric Scope of Practice

The American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

In the current medical environment, establishing parameters within which a specialist may practice is very important. The following document has been developed to define the appropriate practice for physicians who specialize in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R).

Using skills developed in ACGME-accredited residency training programs, and in some cases fellowship training, PM&R specialists routinely diagnose and treat inpatients and outpatients with medical, musculoskeletal, neurological and neuromuscular disorders, emphasizing function, rehabilitation and quality of life. PM&R specialists treat patients of all ages afflicted with function limiting and/or painful conditions involving: central and peripheral nervous system, cardiopulmonary and musculoskeletal systems. This includes but is not limited to disorders of the spine, peripheral joints, soft tissues, bone injuries, sprains/strains, disc herniations, rheumatologic conditions and athletic injuries. PM&R specialists also diagnose and treat degenerative, developmental, acquired, and traumatic conditions of the upper and lower limbs, spinal cord, and brain. This unique blend of education, training and experience makes the PM&R specialist an ideal primary or consulting physician for patients with occupational or sports-related musculoskeletal or neuromuscular injuries. This multidisciplinary training also makes the PM&R physician the most qualified specialist to lead the team of medical specialists and rehabilitation therapists involved in a patient's rehabilitative care.

PM&R specialists beyond their basic qualifications as licensed physicians are specially trained to prescribe therapeutic exercise, orthotic, prosthetic and other rehabilitation equipment and modalities. They are experts in the performance and interpretation of electrodiagnostic studies including electromyography, nerve conduction studies, and evoked potentials. PM&R specialists use routine laboratory and imaging studies, but they are also trained in the interpretation of more sophisticated diagnostic studies that evaluate musculoskeletal and neuromuscular systems such as CT, myelography, bone scan, bone density, MRI, and musculoskeletal ultrasound. All PM&R physicians are trained to perform injection techniques such as peripheral nerve blockade, trigger point injections, soft tissue and joint injections, and the injection of neurolytic agents and botulinum toxin. Many PM&R specialists perform fluoroscopically directed spinal and joint procedures such as interlaminar and transforminal epidural injections, sympathetic blockade, discography, zygapophysial joint injections sacroiliac joint intra-articular injections and other advanced neuromodulation interventional pain management techniques. Many PM&R specialists are also skilled in manual medicine and acupuncture.

The American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation asserts that all PM&R specialists who have completed a PM&R residency have adequate training to practice in the following areas:

1. Inpatient and outpatient musculoskeletal and neuromuscular diagnosis and rehabilitation;
2. Electrodiagnostic medicine;
3. Acute and chronic pain management;
4. Injury prevention, conditioning, fitness and wellness;
5. Non-surgical spine medicine;



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6. Occupational and sports medicine
7. Therapeutic and diagnostic injection techniques
8. Assessments of function, disability and impairment.
9. Rehabilitative care of amputations for both congenital and acquired conditions
10. Rehabilitative care of brain and spinal cord disorders.
11. Post fracture and joint arthroplasty rehabilitative care.
12. Tissue disorders such as burns, ulcers, and wound care.
13. Rehabilitative care of pulmonary, cardiac, and oncological conditions.
14. Rehabilitation of polydisease and general debilitation

In addition, the Academy further asserts that many physical medicine and rehabilitation Specialists can demonstrate experience that qualifies them to also practice in the following areas:

1. Interventional diagnostic and therapeutic spinal procedures; and
2. Interventional pain management.
3. Diagnostic and interventional musculoskeletal ultrasound.

In summary, physical medicine and rehabilitation is a diverse specialty allowing its members to seek and pursue many special interests.

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