

Recognizing Emerging Neurologic Subspecialties



SUBSPECIALTY RECOGNITION – THE FIRST STEP IN SETTING THE STANDARDS OF COMPETENCE AND EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE FOR EMERGING SUBSPECIALTIES

The trend of subspecialization in the field of neurology started evolving in the late 1990's. Since that time, numerous neurologic subspecialties have emerged and are now viable training and career choices for physicians.

Neurologic subspecialties that have developed to the point that they can demonstrate they are discrete practice areas with a unique body of knowledge may apply for recognition through the United Council for Neurologic Subspecialties (UCNS). Through the UCNS recognition application process, small neurologic subspecialties begin the first steps of strategically developing and defining the standards of competence for physicians and the measures of excellence for training programs in the subspecialty field.

Applications are reviewed by the [UCNS Board of Directors](#) who are leaders in the field in neurology and appointed by the five UCNS founding parent organizations and UCNS recognized member subspecialties. Subspecialties approved for recognition are guided through the process of developing the examination that certifies the knowledge and skills of physicians and the accreditation criteria that recognizes excellence in fellowship training programs.

WHY SEEK UCNS SUBSPECIALTY RECOGNITION?

UCNS-recognized neurologic subspecialties have the validation that there are quality standards for their area of medicine. They can be proud that standards are developed by experts in the field, including the certification and accreditation criteria and oversight that sets them apart from other "unrecognized" subspecialties.

Vision

To help small neurologic subspecialties develop credibility and grow.

Mission

To promote high quality patient-centered care through accreditation of training programs and certification of physicians in neurologic subspecialties.

Testimonial



"Headache Medicine suffered for many years under biases about it being a minor and unimportant area in neurology. This changed gradually thanks to much excellent work in classification, research, and therapeutics. UCNS certification of subspecialists and accreditation of programs was an added very powerful validation." Morris Levin, MD, Director, Headache Center, UCSF Medical Center



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WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN UCNS AND ABPN/ABMS SUBSPECIALTY CERTIFICATION?

Leaders in the field of neurology saw a need for emerging subspecialties to have an avenue for certification and accreditation in their field. Small subspecialties that don't qualify for ABMS recognition can pursue certification under a rigorous and reputable process developed and overseen by the UCNS.

The UCNS certification eligibility criteria and examination process is closely aligned with the ABPN. Examinations are conducted under proctored supervision at Pearson VUE testing centers.

Psychometricians are involved before, during, and after each subspecialty examination to assure administration of quality examinations and psychometrically valid results.

[Get Answers to Certification Frequently Asked Questions](#)

SPONSORING ORGANIZATIONS – THE EXPERTS DEFINING THE STANDARDS FOR SUBSPECIALTIES

Subspecialty recognition must be supported and brought forward by one or more sponsoring organizations (e.g., related medical society, AAN section, etc.). Members appointed by the sponsoring organization(s) provide the pool of experts who are actively involved in determining the minimum standard of knowledge for the subspecialty and developing the certification examination.

“I am a strong supporter of certification and accreditation. My expertise is in autonomic, neuromuscular disorders, and pain, and I’m certified in all three. I am also the program director of the UCNS–accredited Autonomic Disorders fellowship here at Mayo. I think UCNS has a dual role to protect, foster, and support subspecialties’ identities and quality.” Paola A. Sandroni, MD, Mayo Clinic-Rochester

UCNS CERTIFICATION – A MEASURE OF EXPERTISE

Certification provides a means of identifying physicians who are properly trained and experienced in a subspecialty area of practice. There are currently over 2,700 [certified UCNS diplomates](#). New subspecialties begin setting the certification criteria with the UCNS-specific core eligibility requirements related to licensure, board certification, and training, while experts from the subspecialty sponsoring organization(s) have the ability to set added criteria specific to the specialty. An initial “grandfathering” period provides a practice track pathway for experienced physicians to apply for certification while the subspecialty and its accredited programs grow. After expiration of the initial practice track period, sponsoring organizations have the option to request extensions for the practice track eligibility period. Fellows who graduate from UCNS-accredited programs have up to four years after completion of their program to apply for certification, providing time to get established in their career. The [Certification Council](#) conducts general oversight of the certification process.

RECERTIFICATION – COMMITMENT TO LIFELONG LEARNING

Initial UCNS certification is valid for 10 years to assure physicians are keeping up on the advancements in their subspecialty field. The maintenance of UCNS certification is not an onerous process. There are no “PIPs” or self-assessment examinations required. UCNS maintenance of certification is as easy as 1, 2, 3! Physicians must have: 1) an active, valid, unrestricted, and unqualified medical license to practice in the U.S. or Canada, 2) current certification in their ABMS primary specialty, and 3) 300 *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™* with 20% specific to their UCNS subspecialty. Successful completion and passing of a recertification examination is required before expiration of the time-limited certification.

UCNS ACCREDITATION – A MEASUREMENT OF EXCELLENCE

UCNS-accredited programs meet the standards and program requirements set by the UCNS and subspecialty experts. There are currently over 175 [UCNS-accredited training programs](#) in nine UCNS-recognized neurologic subspecialties.

Accreditation is a voluntary process of evaluation and peer-review based on UCNS accreditation standards. Programs that attain accreditation status offer the core curriculum established by the subspecialty and meet the required quality standards established by the UCNS. Fellows who complete a UCNS-accredited program meet the training [eligibility requirements](#) to apply for certification in the subspecialty.

To apply for accreditation, programs complete the online application demonstrating compliance with the program requirements.

ACCREDITATION COUNCIL – PROVIDING PEER REVIEW OF FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS

Accreditation standards are determined, and peer evaluation and oversight are provided, by the [Accreditation Council](#). The Council is made up of experts from the field of neurology who have substantial experience in administration and/or education, have knowledge of the accreditation process, and have involvement or prior experience in graduate medical education, including peer review.

UCNS-accredited programs submit annual reports electronically that provide the most up-to-date information on their programs to assure ongoing compliance with the [accreditation standards](#). Reaccreditation review is required at least every five years.

TESTIMONIAL



“Simply put, UCNS provides a mechanism for assuring the quality of sub-specialization training and certification in those fields that are highly important to helping patients, yet too small for larger, more traditional boarding mechanisms. Thus, UCNS indirectly serves patients with less common

neurological disorders by maintaining and raising the bar across multiple neurologic subspecialties.” Paul Graham Fisher, MD, MHS, Professor of Pediatric Neuro-oncology, Stanford University



ACCREDITATION APPLICATION DEADLINES

June 1 – Applications due for fall accreditation review

December 1 – Applications due for spring accreditation review

More

Subspecialty Recognition

UCNS-accredited programs and certified physicians receive greater recognition and visibility through proactive outreach to the neurology community.

Get answers to Accreditation Frequently Asked Questions

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*Certifying physicians and
accrediting training
programs in emerging
neurologic subspecialties.*



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UCNS SUBSPECIALTY RECOGNITION – HOW TO APPLY

When a subspecialty has grown to the point of meeting the UCNS recognition criteria, the process begins with an [application](#) submitted by the subspecialty's sponsoring organization(s).

Neurologic Subspecialty Application Criteria

1. Agree to abide by the UCNS accreditation and certification standards.
2. Demonstrate that the subspecialty represents a unique body of scientific knowledge in neurology.
3. Agree on the training requirements and certification process by the major organizations in the specialty and subspecialties.
4. Demonstrate that there is an organizational structure in the subspecialty that can develop and sustain the accreditation of training programs and certification of fellows. The elements to be considered include, but are not limited to:
 - a. One or more national organizational sponsors that broadly represent the interests of the subspecialty and are capable of providing the experts necessary to support the required accreditation and certification activities through UCNS.
 - b. Recognition of the subspecialty by a national medical organization.
 - c. One or more national peer-reviewed medical journals that regularly publish the basic or clinical research being conducted by the members of the subspecialty.

5. Demonstrate that there exists a comprehensive definition of the subspecialty (core curriculum) in a form that would support the development of examination specifications and competencies.

6. Demonstrate that there exists a comprehensive set of training requirements to support the approval of accredited training programs approved by the UCNS Board or, alternatively, to demonstrate the capacity to produce requirements acceptable to the UCNS Board within two years and prior to the initiation of the certification process.

7. Demonstrate that there currently exist at least five training programs in the subspecialty.

Make it official!

Be on the leading edge of defining the standards of expertise and training excellence for emerging neurologic subspecialties to assure strategic growth in the field, enhanced credibility, and quality care for patients.