



SUBSPECIALTY SPONSORING ORGANIZATION HANDBOOK

An overview of UCNS and the roles and responsibilities of subspecialty sponsoring organizations in the UCNS certification and accreditation process.

Subspecialty Sponsoring Organization Handbook

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1. UCNS Overview

a. Mission & Vision

UCNS Mission

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

UCNS Vision

To help small neurologic subspecialties develop credibility and grow.

b. History

Advances in neuroscience were occurring at an explosive rate, giving birth to innovative technologies and treatments which promised dramatic improvements in neurologic care. By 2000, 75 percent of neurology residents sought to enter fellowship programs to develop subspecialty expertise. Although there were abundant opportunities for neurology fellowships, training requirements varied considerably. Most fellowships were not accredited, and their graduates were not certified. To provide a means for formal recognition of emerging neurologic subspecialties and an opportunity to improve training for subspecialties through the development of training and clinical competence standards, the leaders in the field of Neurology collaborated to support and nurture neurologic subspecialties.

2001

The American Academy of Neurology developed the Commission on Subspecialty Certification comprised of five leading neurology organizations with a common interest of supporting and nurturing neurologic subspecialties:

- American Academy of Neurology
- American Neurological Association
- Association of Academic Leaders of Neurology
- Child Neurology Society (CNS)
- Child Neurology Educators Committee of the CNS

2002

The five founding parent organizations established the structure, function, and budget for an accrediting and certifying body for emerging subspecialties

2003

The United Council for Neurologic Subspecialties (UCNS) was incorporated as an independent 501(c)(6) nonprofit organization.

c. Parent Organizations

The five founding parent organizations have an ongoing role in the governance of the UCNS. Each parent organization nominates a voting representative to the nine-member board of directors and holds the majority of voting seats ensuring that the leading neurology organizations continue to have a majority stake in the governance of the UCNS. They are also the source of nominations for the Certification and Accreditation Councils, the bodies that are responsible for the oversight of the respective UCNS programs.

d. Board of Directors

The **UCNS Board of Directors** is comprised of representatives nominated by each of the parent organizations, subspecialty sponsoring organizations, liaisons from the American Board of Psychiatry & Neurology and Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, and executive directors of the parent organizations who serve in an ex-officio capacity. The Board provides overall governance for the organization.

e. Councils

The **Certification and Accreditation Councils** provide peer oversight of UCNS accreditation and certification activities. Council member nominations are submitted by the five parent organizations, and the nominations are reviewed and approved by the UCNS Board Chair. The Councils report to the UCNS Board of Directors.

2. UCNS Role

UCNS was established to provide emerging neurologic subspecialties an opportunity to offer a credible accreditation and certification process that is developed and maintained by leading organizations and experts in the field of neurology and has the ongoing leadership and involvement of volunteers from the parent and sponsoring organizations.

a. Policies

UCNS establishes the **policies** and expert oversight of the certification and accreditation process:

- Develops and maintains the UCNS general eligibility requirements for certification and common program requirements for training program accreditation
- Provides expert peer-reviewed Council oversight of all accrediting and certifying activities to ensure compliance with the established policies and procedures

b. Standards

UCNS provides industry-recognized and respected standards

- Board of Directors, Council, and committee volunteers represent the leading neurology and subspecialty organizations
- Certification and accreditation standards, though modeled after American Board of Medical Specialties and Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education standards, are scaled to ensure successful administration for smaller subspecialties

c. Infrastructure

UCNS provides the infrastructure to administer the accreditation and certification activities:

- Administers the **initial certification**, **continuous-certification**, and **accreditation** processes for all UCNS-recognized neurologic subspecialties with a professional staff of five full-time employees and legal and accounting support of the AAN
- Coordinates the certification examination development cycle for all subspecialty initial exams, continuous-certification activities, and over 100 volunteers who are involved in the process
- Manages the accreditation application and annual reporting process to ensure program compliance with the established requirements and policies
- Maintains records for all UCNS diplomates, accredited programs, and applicants
- Secures and manages the technical platforms needed to successfully administer certification and accreditation activities
- Develops and administers annual budgets that ensure financial viability of the organization to support its mission and full transparency through availability of **financial disclosures** of audited financial statements

d. Promotion and Communication

UCNS provides promotion for increased awareness of diplomates and accredited training programs:

- Maintains online directories for easy identification of **diplomates** and **accredited programs**
- Participates and exhibits at American Academy of Neurology and Child Neurology Society annual meetings
- Distributes press releases announcing new diplomates and accredited training programs through UCNS, parent, and sponsoring organization communication channels
- Provides monthly **UCNS Updates (Circulation 5,000+)** and **Diplomate Updates (Circulation ~3,000)** through UCNS email distribution lists
- Develops subspecialty-specific certification and accreditation information for distribution at subspecialty society meetings

e. Ongoing Subspecialty Review and Status Updates

UCNS monitors subspecialty growth and trends and provides sponsoring organizations with **annual updates** on subspecialty certification and accreditation status including:

- Certification examination participation and outcomes
- Diplomate and accredited fellowship program retention and growth
- Fellowship program enrollment

f. Staff

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3. Subspecialty Sponsoring Organizations

UCNS subspecialty recognition begins with an **application process** that is initiated by one or more subspecialty sponsoring organizations. Through this application process emerging neurologic subspecialties can strategically develop and define the standards of competence for physicians and the measure of excellence for training programs in their subspecialty field. Once approved, changes to subspecialty-specific certification and accreditation criteria can only be initiated by the **sponsoring organizations** and/or their designated UCNS committees or task forces.

a. Current Sponsoring Organizations

Autonomic Disorders

- American Autonomic Society
- AAN on behalf of the Autonomic Nervous System Section

Behavioral Neurology & Neuropsychiatry

- American Neuropsychiatric Association
- Society for Behavioral and Cognitive Neurology

Clinical Neuromuscular Pathology

- AAN on behalf of the Neuromuscular Section

Geriatric Neurology

- AAN on behalf of the Geriatric Neurology Section

Headache Medicine

- American Headache Society
- AAN on behalf of the Headache & Facial Pain Section

Interventional Neurology

- International Society of Interventional Neurology
- American Neurological Association
- Society of Vascular and Interventional Neurology

Neonatal Neurocritical Care

- The Newborn Brain Society

Neurocritical Care

- AAN on behalf of the Critical Care & Emergency Neurology Section
- Neurocritical Care Society

Neuroimaging

- No sponsoring organization (subspecialty phase-out through 2027)

Neuro-oncology

- AAN on behalf of the Neuro-oncology Section

b. Roles and Responsibilities

Subspecialty sponsoring organizations have an ongoing active role in developing, maintaining, and updating the standards for their respective subspecialty and have a voice in the governance of the UCNS through representation on the UCNS Board of Directors. Subspecialties with more than one sponsoring organization work together for united representation on behalf of the subspecialty.

Sponsoring organizations begin the **subspecialty recognition process**:

- Coordinate and submit the subspecialty recognition application to the UCNS
- Develop and propose the subspecialty core curriculum for training programs
- Develop and propose the subspecialty training program requirements
- Develop and propose the subspecialty content outline for certification examinations

Sponsoring organizations are the **source of nominations** for subspecialty representation:

- One seat on the **UCNS Board of Directors**, rotating voting/non-voting seat
- **Minimum of ten subject matter experts** who are responsible for the developing and updating the subspecialty's certification examination, annual continuous-certification (C-cert) quiz, and identification of journal articles for the subspecialty's annual C-cert reading list
- Three experts who serve on the Training Program Review Task Force review and update training requirements a minimum of once every five years
- Three representatives who make up the subspecialty's Milestones Development Task Force that develops the subspecialty's training program milestones

Sponsoring organizations are the **source of subspecialty-specific change**:

- Propose **subspecialty training requirements** changes, as needed
- Propose **certification eligibility requirements** changes, as needed

c. Proposing Subspecialty-Specific Criteria Changes

Sponsoring organizations are responsible for developing and maintaining the subspecialty-specific requirements and criteria for their subspecialty's certification and accreditation programs. Requirements outlined in the **General Eligibility Requirements** for certification and **Common Program Requirements** for training programs can be changed only at the recommendation of the relevant Council and approved by the Board of Directors after a 30-day comment period. The current certification eligibility and program requirements for each subspecialty are available on the UCNS website.

Changes to subspecialty-specific requirements may be proposed in writing to the UCNS at any time by the subspecialty's sponsoring organization(s). Proposed changes are reviewed by the respective Council before going to the Board of Directors for consideration. If approved, the subspecialty's documents will be updated to reflect the changes. Subspecialty-specific training program requirements undergo a scheduled five-year review by a task force nominated by the sponsoring organization(s), though sponsoring organizations may propose changes at any time.

d. Adding Sponsoring Organizations Post-Recognition

In 2019, the UCNS created a pathway for qualifying organizational sponsors to be added after the initial subspecialty recognition application has been submitted. After approval of an initial subspecialty application for recognition, other medical associations or societies, AAN subspecialty sections, or special interest groups of a primary neurological association or society may apply to be included as a sponsoring organization for the subspecialty. They must:

1. Represent the interests of the subspecialty
2. Provide a letter requesting membership as a sponsoring organization of the subspecialty
3. Provide a letter supporting membership from the current subspecialty sponsoring organization(s)
4. Endorse the program requirements, core content, and practice track requirements in place at the time of application, and
5. Agree to pay their portion of the annual sponsoring organization fee

Approval of any requests will be determined by the UCNS Board of Directors.

e. Annual Sponsoring Organization Fee

Sponsoring organizations pay a one-time application fee at the time of the initial subspecialty application submission and agree to pay an annual administrative fee to the UCNS if subspecialty recognition is approved. The annual administrative fee is divided between a subspecialty's sponsoring organizations. Fees are billed annually in March of each year with payment due in full by May 1st.

Sponsoring Organization Fees (subject to change):

- \$1,000 application fee (one-time fee paid at time of application submission)
- \$1,000 annual administrative fee

f. Promotion of UCNS Certification and Accreditation

Fostering the growth of emerging subspecialties requires a partnership with the sponsoring organization to communicate and support the certification and accreditation programs that are administered on behalf of the subspecialty by the UCNS. The UCNS provides sponsoring organizations with information that can be distributed through the sponsoring organizations' communication channels such as:

- Include UCNS information on sponsoring organization website
- Distribute UCNS messaging through sponsoring organization communication channels
- Distribute UCNS certification/accreditation information at subspecialty society meetings
- Request UCNS articles relating to certification/accreditation for inclusion in society newsletter(s)
- Provide complimentary advertising space for UCNS to promote certification/accreditation opportunities (i.e., society journal, newsletter, e-newsletter, website, annual meeting program book, etc.)

g. Nomination of Subspecialty Representatives

UCNS will reach out annually to all UCNS-recognized subspecialties with a call for volunteers. Sponsoring organizations are responsible for identifying and nominating the subject matter experts and leaders who will be responsible for representing their subspecialty in the important roles on the [Board of Directors](#), [Certification Examination Committee](#), and Task Forces. The appendices include job descriptions and detailed information about the committee's responsibilities and terms.

h. Active Volunteer Participation

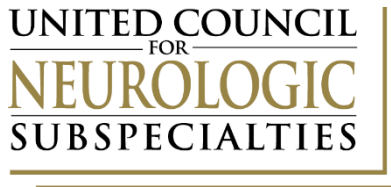
The volunteer job descriptions include an estimate of the time commitment for Board and committee members. When making nominations to fill volunteer seats, it is important that sponsoring organizations nominate volunteers who have the expertise needed to fill the volunteer role and also have the ability to commit to the time needed to participate and complete volunteer assignments as applicable. All UCNS volunteers must complete and submit a [Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement](#).

4. Appendices

Appendix A – Subspecialty Board Member/Representative Job Description

Appendix B – Certification Examination Committee Member Job Description

Appendix A



Neurologic Subspecialty Board Member/Representative Job Description

*The business and affairs of the UCNS are managed by its **Board of Directors**. Each neurologic subspecialty area has one representative seat on the UCNS Board. The voting rights of the subspecialty board seats rotate amongst the UCNS recognized subspecialties when terms end with no more than four voting subspecialty representative seats on the Board at one time. The non-voting subspecialty representatives provide feedback and insights into Board discussions and decision making.*

TERM: 2 years, with the opportunity for re-appointment for one additional two-year term if re-nominated by the Sponsoring Organization(s)

TIME COMMITMENT:

- Two face-to-face business meetings each calendar year in the spring and fall.
 - Spring meeting is scheduled to coincide with the American Academy of Neurology Annual Meeting (2-3 hours)
 - Fall meeting is a full day strategic planning and board meeting at the UCNS headquarter office in Minneapolis, MN (as needed)
- Two to three 1.5-hour conference calls per year or as business requires.
- 1-2 hours to review meeting information and documents prior to each meeting

FINANCIAL: This is a volunteer position. Reimbursement for meeting expenses is based on the voting status of the representative seat during the term.

- **Voting representatives:** UCNS pays travel and lodging related expenses for voting members to attend face-to-face meetings. The only exception is the spring meeting in the event a voting director is also a registered attendee for the AAN Annual Meeting. There is also the option for participation in all meetings via conference call or Zoom.
- **Non-voting representatives:** UCNS does not pay travel or lodging related expenses for non-voting members to attend face-to-face meetings. There is the option for participation in all meetings via conference call or Zoom.

SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Assist with the review, revision, implementation, and support of UCNS policies, procedures, and the strategic plan.
2. Prepare for, attend, and conscientiously participate in board meetings
3. Make decisions in the best interest of the organization (voting members).
4. Maintain confidentiality about all internal matters of the organization
5. Must abide by **UCNS bylaws and policies**, including conflict of interest and confidentiality policies.
6. Serve as an active advocate and ambassador for the organization.

QUALIFICATIONS:

- ABPN-certified neurologist
- UCNS certified in the respective representative neurologic subspecialty with a **certification status** of “meeting requirements” (preferred, not required)
- Demonstrated leadership ability
- Knowledge of UCNS activities and mission
- Willingness to commit the time needed and work collaboratively with other board members

Appendix B



Examination Committee Job Description

Certification examination committee members are responsible for the development and completion of the subspecialty certification examinations and Continuous-certification (C-cert) annual reading list and quizzes. Each committee is comprised of a minimum of 10 subspecialty experts who are appointed by the subspecialty's sponsoring organization(s). Appointments are reviewed for approval by the UCNS Certification Council. All examination committees report to the Certification Council.

ESTIMATED TIME COMMITMENT:

- Certification examination development (biennial, beginning 9 months prior to examination) 20-30 hours
- C-cert journal article list selection and C-cert knowledge assessment quiz development (annually, Aug-Dec.) 12 hours

TERM: 2-3 years, terms may be renewed once

ELIGIBILITY: Must be able to meet the same eligibility criteria as applicants who apply to sit for the certification examination. Committee members must be UCNS “certified - meeting requirements” in the subspecialty or pass the subspecialty certification examination via an essay examination within six months of appointment. Examination committee members will have their initial examination application fee and/or annual C-cert fee waived while actively serving on the committee. Required c-cert assessment activities will also be waived during their term on the committee. Committee members are subject to the annual C-cert fees and activity requirements after their committee term expires.

Please note: Participation on outside committees related to subspecialty board review courses or examination development while serving on a UCNS examination committee may present a conflict of interest that must be mitigated by the UCNS or may prohibit participation on an examination committee.

DESIRED SKILLS AND ABILITIES: Expert knowledge in the subspecialty field; previous question writing experience preferred. Must be able to commit the time needed to complete assigned tasks by the established deadlines.

RESPONSIBILITIES:

_General Responsibilities:

- Participate in all scheduled examination committee meetings.
- Ability and commitment to meeting assignment deadlines.
- Respond in a timely manner to committee-related emails.
- Maintain confidentiality of UCNS certification examination and C-cert quiz.
- Complete annual Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement and update disclosure if changes occur throughout the year

Certification Examination

- Write, edit, and review/proof, examination questions (mandatory).
- Participate in Zoom meetings during the development of the examinations.
- Participate in proofing of certification examinations prior to publishing.
- Participate in two post-exam conference calls (1 to 1 ½ hour each)
 - Review items flagged by the psychometrician that statistically performed poorly and make decisions on those items for scoring
 - Review final psychometric report that provides examination results and final data from exam
- One face-to-face committee meeting in Minneapolis, MN or via Zoom to set the pass point. Pass point reset happens after 4-5 examination cycles (every 8-10 years due to biennial schedule).

C-Cert Activities

- Identify and submit journal articles that meet the [C-cert Reading List Submission Criteria](#)
- Assist in ranking and committee selection of up to 10 journal articles annually that support new developments in the subspecialty field
- Participate in writing, editing, and reviewing/proofing the questions that will be used on the annual 25-question [C-cert knowledge assessment quiz](#)
- Participate in Zoom meetings during the development of the annual C-cert activities.

ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES FOR NEW SUBSPECIALTIES: (For development of first subspecialty examinations only)

- Review and finalize the proposed examination content outline.
- Develop questions for initial certification examination; each member writes a minimum of 25-30 questions (due in 10-question intervals/3 assignment periods).
- Attend a minimum of three exam development meetings via Zoom.
 - First meeting is to review and select the first 100 questions.
 - Second meeting is to review and select an additional 100 questions.
 - Third meeting to select final 200 examination questions and ensure examination content aligns with examination content outline weighting.
- Standard setting meeting prior to certification examination administration conducted in person or by Zoom to set the examination pass point (full day meeting).
- Pass subspecialty essay examination to receive subspecialty certification.