



ABNS Certification Pathway for Graduates of non-ACGME Programs who are Exceptional Neurosurgical Faculty at ACGME-accredited Neurosurgery Residency Programs

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Is this a *NEW* pathway to ABNS board certification?

It is not. The ABNS has had a long-standing rule (4.10) stating that the ABNS Board, “at its sole discretion and under extraordinary circumstances...may consider training formats not specified in these Rules and Regulations. In rare cases where the applicant's training, practice, and professional stature leave no doubt as to his or her exceptional qualifications, the Board may grant permission for the applicant to be examined for certification.”

However, the ABNS is now endeavoring to codify the process. Specifically, to better define what it means to say that an “applicant's training, practice, and professional stature leave no doubt as to their exceptional qualifications.”

2. How do I know if I'm eligible for the pathway to ABNS certification for exceptional academic-based practicing neurosurgeons who graduated from non-ACGME approved neurosurgery residency programs?

Individuals who are interested in learning about or considering applying to this pathway can find detailed information on the ABNS website (ABNS.org).

Applicants for consideration must:

- a. Currently serve as core teaching faculty (as defined by the ACGME) at the primary teaching site of an ACGME accredited neurosurgery residency program.
 - a. Attestation from the applicant and his or her department chair that at least 15 hours per week are spent at the primary teaching site.
- b. The candidate must have served for at least 6 years at an ACGME accredited neurosurgery residency program. All or a portion of the 6 years must be within 3 years of application.
- c. Have completed an ACGME, ABPNS or CAST certified fellowship in the US.
- d. Be certified as a neurosurgeon by the generally accepted certification body for medical specialties in the country of their residency completion.
- e. Have demonstrated excellence as a clinician, educator and researcher, as demonstrated by supporting documentation to that effect (in the form of (a) 6 letters of recommendation from ABNS certified neurosurgeons; (b) a letter of support from the department chair; and (c) perhaps most importantly, a verifiable academic CV demonstrating such excellence).
- f. Have achieved minimum academic rank of Associate Professor.

Once application materials demonstrating the above have been submitted (all of which must be in English or translated by a nationally recognized US translation service), the ABNS Executive Committee will consider the credentials of the applicant, and whether those credentials meet all of the

above requirements, including demonstrated excellence as a clinician, educator and researcher. The Executive Committee will make a recommendation to the full ABNS Board, which must vote unanimously to approve a candidate's credentials.

We remind applicants that the ABNS Bylaws give the ABNS Board "sole discretion" to determine whether and applicant's "extraordinary circumstances" justify application of this pathway. We caution that only truly exceptional candidates will be considered and that the decision of the ABNS Board to not approve a particular application will be final and not subject to appeal.

No conversations or "lobbying" efforts outside the submitted materials will be considered and any such efforts are likely, if anything, to dissuade the Board from approving an application. If an applicant is truly exceptional, that will be apparent from the application materials standing on their own.

If and when the candidate's credentials are unanimously approved by the ABNS Board, they must then, in this order:

- g. Pass the ABNS written examination. Candidates will have three attempts to pass.
- h. Submit ABNS POST case log of 125 consecutive cases performed over an 18-month period and have the case log approved by the ABNS.
 - a. The submission must meet the same requirements as others applying for board certification.
 - b. Cases to be included can start on date of application approval
 - c. Case log will be reviewed by a current Director of the ABNS Board of Directors
- i. Pass all three sections of the ABNS oral examination (general, focused practice and the candidate's own cases). Candidates will be given three attempts to pass.

3. If I apply, am I guaranteed to be put on the pathway to certification? And am I board eligible or tracking to board certification?

No. As noted above, final approval of a candidate's credentials and the ability to proceed and take the primary examination and case log portion of the process will be by unanimous approval of the ABNS Board of Directors (after the ABNS Executive Committee's detailed review of the candidate's eligibility, including their academic, research, letters of reference and clinical contributions to the field).

At no time during the process will an individual who is pursuing board certification through this pathway be considered board eligible or tracking to board certification (and may not advertise or refer to themselves as such).

4. I work at a satellite hospital for a large academic healthcare system where residents rotate, am I eligible for certification?

No. Eligible individuals must be core faculty (as defined by the ACGME) at the primary teaching site of an ACGME accredited neurosurgery training program.

5. I have not completed an ACGME or CAST approved fellowship, am I eligible for certification?

No. Eligible individuals must have completed either an ACGME or CAST approved fellowship in the United States.

6. What are examples of “significant contributions to the field of neurological surgery” that will qualify me for the pathway?

Significant contributions shall include a review of the following metrics. These will help the committee holistically assess the candidate by examining important facets required of leaders in academic neurosurgery. Candidates typically must excel in at least 5 of these metrics, although the Board reserves the right to take other accomplishments into account. The ABNS reserves the right to amend this list at any time.

1. H-index (typically a minimum of at least 20, which journals articles appear in)
 - a. Not including Google
2. Number of times served as a Primary Investigator for national trials or registries
3. Evidence of significant NIH grant support (Ex. K series, R series, U series, D series and P series) or other equivalent grant support
4. Patents or device design that have advanced neurosurgical science
5. Documented exceptionalism in teaching (awards, nationally recognized fellowship program, leader of national courses/seminars).
6. National leadership positions
7. Clinical excellence, which will include (but not be limited to) a review of techniques and patient outcomes for the cases entered in ABNS POST

7. If I fail the primary examination can I still obtain certification through this pathway?

You must pass the ABNS written examination to move forward in this pathway for Certification. The test can be taken up to three times, in three years. Once the applicant has had his or her credentials approved and thus receives approval to take the primary examination, he or she will have seven years to complete the entire process for ABNS certification.

8. If my case log is not approved, can I still obtain certification through this pathway?

Your case log must be approved in order to sit for the oral examination. In some instances, the candidate's case log is approved as submitted. In other instances, the candidate will be expected to respond satisfactorily to queries from the ABNS reviewer before a case log is approved. In other instances, at the Board's discretion, if a candidate's case log is rejected, the applicant may submit additional cases and have the case log re-reviewed. But ultimately, the case log must be approved. There is a possibility a case log may never be approved, although in that situation alone, the candidate will be entitled to a hearing before the rejection of his or her case log is final.

Additionally, the original application that was approved will need to be updated at the time the ABNS POST case log is submitted.

9. If I fail the ABNS Oral examination, can I still obtain certification?

The ABNS oral examination, all three sessions, must be passed in order to obtain ABNS Board Certification; the test can be taken up to 3 attempts in 3 years.

10. If I am not approved for participation in the certification pathway, can I reapply at a later date?

It depends. If you met all of the criteria listed in response to FAQ 2, above, and simply fail to successfully complete the process (e.g., if you fail the oral exam three times), you may not re-apply. However, if the ABNS Board, following Executive Committee review, determines that you did not meet some of the required criteria, you may re-apply once you believe those criteria have been met. But please be aware that the same

stringent criteria will be applied in every instance, that a new \$7,000 application fee must be submitted with each application and that the fee is non-refundable.

11. The ABNS announced this program once already and then suspended it. Is this program now permanent? Can program directors and others rely on it when making recruitment decisions.

The program was launched once and immediately suspended due to the ABNS immediately recognizing institutions endeavoring to manipulate the process not aligned with the spirit or intent of the program. Following this, ABNS included a larger group of stakeholders for discussion.

Having taken the stakeholder input into account, refined the criteria so it more clearly matches the intent and ensuring that a very high bar has been set for an alternative pathway for truly exceptional individuals.

We **strongly** caution institutions not to seek to manipulate system, such as by offering low-paid academic positions to individuals from non-ACGME residencies in the hope that those individuals will qualify for the alternative pathway. The pathway is intended to (and will be limited to) those who have made extraordinary contributions to the field of neurosurgery. ABNS forecasts that in a typical year that no more than 5-10 individuals are likely to be approved through the credentials review process.

This is a “demonstration” program. Which means it is subject to further refinement, suspension, and cancelation at any time without prior notice.

