

People

Physicians. Physicians can go through up to 18 years of education to be trained in particular specialty areas. There are 24 specialties in medicine recognized by the American Board of Medical Specialties. Physicians who successfully complete specialty training complete comprehensive written and oral exams to become “board certified.” Usually, the “first line” doctor the patient sees is a “generalist.” Again, as a generalist, the physician went through residencies and training in these areas. The “first line” doctor may be a primary care physician, family care physician, or internal medicine physician. For older adults, a physician board certified in geriatric medicine is referred to as a geriatrician.

Nurses. Similar to physicians, nurses often specialize in various areas particularly through advanced education. Registered nurses (RNs) have graduated from college or university programs that range from 2 to 4 years in length. Licensed practical nurses (LPNs) have less training than RNs and thus are restricted in terms of their scope of practice compared to RNs. Advanced practice RNs can either be clinical nurse specialists or nurse practitioners. Both have advanced education through master’s or doctoral training in addition to certification training. Both also need to pass a certification exam in their specialty field to “officially” be called a clinical nurse specialist or nurse practitioner. Nurses are licensed by the state department of licensing and regulation. Advanced practice certification is administered through the American Nurse Credentialing Center or the American College of Nurse Practitioners. In many cases, nurse practitioners practice in collaboration with physicians. Many individuals choose to see a nurse practitioner for common health problems as they are able to prescribe medications and treatments as well as make referrals.



Certified Nursing Assistants. A certified nursing assistant (CNA) is a trained caregiver who works under the supervision of an RN or LPN and provides direct care, assistance, and performs basic nursing procedures for patients. CNA certification requirements vary by state. Typically, it consists of a 10-12 month education program and clinical experience followed by successful completion of the certification exam. CNAs are also referred to as “paraprofessionals” to differentiate their education and scope of practice from professional nurses.

Others. Other health care providers you may come in contact with include: (1) physician assistants (provide health care, perform treatments, and conduct exams under the supervision of physicians); (2) physical therapists (provide services to improve mobility and function through exercise or other treatment modalities); and (3) occupational therapists (provide services to improve a patient’s ability with self-care through training or use of assistive devices).

People Resources

How do I find out if the physician is board certified? Contact the American Board of Medical Specialties at 800.733.2276 or www.abms.org.

How do I find the best doctors in my area? Contact your state’s Department of Medical Examiners to learn if there are any disciplinary actions against them.

Here is a **video** from physicians about choosing the best doctor.

(URL) <http://youtu.be/jymP8WKStx0>

