

Ask the Expert
Arizona Republic

Q: I'm new to the area and I'm trying to find a good physician for my family. During my search, I've noticed that most physicians boast that they are board certified. What does board certified mean?

A: Being board certified means physicians have participated in a voluntary process that involves the evaluation of their knowledge and skills beyond what's required for them to become licensed physicians. Physicians who undergo and pass these rigorous examinations received their medical specialty certification from the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS).

However, board certification does have a time limitation. In order to maintain their certification, physicians must be periodically reevaluated. This includes presenting evidence of licensure and scope of practice, as well as passing an examination every seven to 10 years, depending upon their specialty. Moreover, to become certified by the ABMS, physicians must be able to illustrate that they have:

- Earned a medical degree, which includes osteopathic medicine or other credentialing as approved by the ABMS;
- Completed the accredited education and training;
- Provided letters of attestation from their medical school's program director and/or faculty;
- Fulfilled residency requirements;
- Been licensed to practice medicine in at least one state, territory or Canada;
- Passed rigorous testing; and
- Met other qualifications as specified by the ABMS Member Board.

Finding the right physician is essential to your family's health. As you continue your search, it's important to keep in mind that board certified specialists are leaders in their field because they voluntarily participate in lifelong learning to keep their skills and knowledge current. These physicians demonstrate their commitment to quality clinical outcomes, patient safety, and a responsive, patient-centered practice through participation in an ongoing Maintenance of Certification program.



Terry Happel, M.D., is the Chief Medical Officer for Chandler Regional Medical Center and Mercy Gilbert Medical Center. Dr. Happel is a board certified surgeon. For more information, or to locate a board certified physician in your area, please call toll-free 1.877.728.5414.