

The American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (AAPM&R) is the national medical specialty organization representing more than 10,000 physicians who are specialists in physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R).

PM&R physicians, also known as physiatrists, treat a wide variety of medical conditions affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles, and tendons. PM&R physicians evaluate and treat injuries, illnesses, and disability, and are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans. Physiatrists utilize cutting-edge as well as time-tested treatments to maximize function and quality of life.

What is Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation?

Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), also known as physiatry or rehabilitation medicine, aims to enhance and restore functional ability and quality of life to those with physical impairments or disabilities affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles, and tendons. Unlike other medical specialties that focus on a medical “cure,” the goals of the physiatrist are to maximize patients’ independence in activities of daily living and improve quality-of-life. Physiatrists are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans, and are integral members of the care team.

What is a Physiatrist?

PM&R physicians are medical doctors who have completed training in the specialty of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R), and may be subspecialty certified in Brain Injury Medicine, Hospice and Palliative Medicine, Neuromuscular Medicine, Pain Medicine, Pediatric Rehabilitation Medicine, Spinal Cord Injury Medicine, and/or Sports Medicine.



Specifically, PM&R physicians:

- ✓ Treat patients of all ages
- ✓ Focus treatment on function
- ✓ Have a broad medical expertise that allows them to treat disabling conditions throughout a person’s lifetime
- ✓ Diagnose and treat pain as a result of an injury, illness, or disabling condition
- ✓ Determine and lead a treatment/prevention plan
- ✓ Lead a team of medical professionals, which may include physical therapists, occupational therapists, and physician extenders to optimize patient care
- ✓ Work with other physicians, which may include primary care physicians, neurologists, orthopedic surgeons, and many others
- ✓ Treat the whole person, not just the problem area

Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation

Depending on the injury, illness, or disabling condition, some PM&R physicians may treat their patients using the following procedures/services:

- ✓ EMG/Nerve Conduction Studies
- ✓ Ultrasound guided procedures
- ✓ Fluoroscopy guided procedures
- ✓ Injections of spine
- ✓ Discography, Disc Decompression and Vertebroplasty/Kyphoplasty
- ✓ Nerve Stimulators, Blocks and Ablation procedures—Peripheral and Spinal
- ✓ Injections of joints
- ✓ Prolotherapy
- ✓ Spasticity Treatment (Phenol and Botulinum toxin injections, intrathecal baclofen pump trial and implants)
- ✓ Nerve and Muscle Biopsy
- ✓ Manual Medicine/Osteopathic Treatment
- ✓ Prosthetics and Orthotics
- ✓ Complementary-alternative medicine (i.e. acupuncture, etc.)
- ✓ Disability/impairment assessment
- ✓ Medicolegal consulting



Practice Settings

PM&R physicians practice in a variety of clinical settings, including inpatient and outpatient facilities. They have a broad range of knowledge including musculoskeletal, neurological, rheumatological and cardiovascular systems.

Some of the common diagnoses and populations seen by inpatient physiatrists include spinal cord injury, brain injury (traumatic and non-traumatic), stroke, multiple sclerosis, polio, burn care, and musculoskeletal and pediatric rehabilitation. Inpatient physiatrists are often trained using collaborative team skills and work with social workers and other allied health therapists (e.g., physical, occupational and speech) to manage these issues.

Outpatient physiatrists manage nonsurgical conditions including orthopaedic injuries, spine-related pain and dysfunction, occupational injuries and overuse syndromes, neurogenic bowel/bladder, pressure sore management, spasticity management, and chronic pain. Outpatient physiatrists are typically found in multidisciplinary groups consisting of other physiatrists, orthopaedic surgeons and/or neurosurgeons.

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