ABEM Statement on Advanced Practice Providers

The American Board of Emergency Medicine (ABEM) believes that the delivery of emergency care is best led by physicians whose training and experience have led to ABEM certification. Physicians complete an undergraduate degree followed by four years of medical school. After medical school graduation, physicians complete an Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)–accredited Emergency Medicine residency program comprised of a minimum of three years in preparation to lead the team-based, complex care of any acutely ill or injured patient.

After residency, the physician must pass a high-stakes, secure, written examination, and a rigorous oral examination to become ABEM certified. ABEM-certified physicians must demonstrate that they are keeping up to date with new advances and meeting national standards in the field of Emergency Medicine to stay certified.

While ABEM honors the contributions to emergency care by other providers, the path to become a nurse practitioner (NP) or physician assistant (PA) is not equivalent to the complex training required to become an ABEM-certified physician. ABEM-certified physicians have completed at least five more clinical years of supervised training, which includes the acquisition of advanced procedural skills, detailed medical knowledge, and complex multifaceted decision-making skills needed to stabilize and resuscitate critically ill and injured patients. ABEM-certified physicians should lead team-based care in the emergency department. At a minimum, indirect but real-time supervision by an ABEM-certified physician must be available. Additionally, the patient should always be afforded the choice and opportunity to speak with a supervising physician.

Providers should inform a patient when he or she is being treated by an advanced practice provider and not an ABEM-certified physician. To avoid confusion, in the clinical arena the use of the term “doctor” should be reserved for physicians and not advanced practice providers. To provide accurate identification of clinical personnel, credentials (e.g., M.D., D.O., R.N.) should be prominently displayed. NPs may obtain doctorate degrees in nursing, but this should not be viewed as equivalent to a degree of Doctor of Medicine awarded to physicians upon successful completion of medical school. The use of the terms “residency” or “fellowship” in conjunction with an advanced practice provider training program should be avoided as they are not equivalent to the training undertaken in an ACGME-accredited Emergency Medicine residency program.

ABEM is committed to guaranteeing that its certification remains the “gold standard” for ensuring the highest standards in the specialty of Emergency Medicine. ABEM-certified physicians serve a valuable and irreplaceable clinical role in the care of the critically ill and injured.