



Updates intended to eliminate FAQs that are no longer relevant, to focus on most commonly asked questions we have received over the three years that the policy has been in place, and to further clarify the difference between Family Leave and other types of leave that apply to all residents (sick, vacation, educational, etc.)

Important Considerations Regarding the Use of this Policy

ABFM Family Leave policy provides guidelines for the upper limits of allowable time for a resident to be away for Family Leave without requiring a training extension to be considered board eligible. This policy is not intended to dictate decisions regarding the date of a resident's graduation that must be made at the residency program level, where it is the responsibility of the Program Director and Clinical Competency Committee (CCC) to determine when a resident has met training competencies and is prepared to enter autonomous practice. Similarly, no program is ever prohibited from extending training for a resident that is not deemed ready for autonomous practice. Decisions regarding training extensions are always made at the residency program level.

The policy refers to circumstances that require more prolonged period of leave, specifically:

- The birth and care of a newborn, adopted, or foster child, including both birth- and non-birth parents of a newborn.
- The care of a family member¹ with a serious health condition, including end of life care.
- A resident's own serious health condition requiring prolonged evaluation and treatment.

It does not refer to time off provided by programs and their sponsoring institutions for vacation, sick leave, holiday, educational leave, or other paid time off. Importantly, it does not override local human resource policies regarding time a resident is able to be away from training.

Questions Related to Allocation of Time and Training Extensions

1. What will ABFM require if a resident is away from training for Family Leave that is greater than 20 weeks during the entire residency?

For board eligibility purposes, if the total time that a resident is away from training for any reason is greater than 20 weeks, the program would need to extend the resident's training equal to the time that their total leave exceeded these parameters.

2. What if my sponsoring institution or program rules do not allow as much time away as the ABFM Time Away from Training / Family Leave policy?

It is important not to confuse ABFM's Time Away from Training/Family Leave policy with federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) rules or any local policies that your program or sponsoring institution utilize. If your program or sponsoring institution does not permit a resident to use up to 12 weeks a year or 20 weeks overall, then you must follow your program/ sponsoring institution's rules to determine training extensions. ABFM policy only pertains to what is allowable that will still permit a resident to be board eligible without extending their training.

3. What are the implications for a resident that wanted to take 12 weeks of parental leave but also extend their residency (e.g., they don't want to forgo the clinical experience/training)? Would it affect a program's ability to offer this, GME payments, etc.?

A resident can always request to extend their residency to optimize their clinical training, as long as the program and institution are supportive of this decision. Decisions about adequacy of patients and experiences, as well as funding to do so, are left to be determined at the program level.

¹Decisions about what constitutes family member and what constitutes serious health condition is best left to the Program Director and their institutional policies. ABFM intends to leave those decisions at the local level where they are best able to be individually made.

4. If a resident wishes to use all their vacation and PTO time for the purposes of Family Leave, do I have to require them to save one week of vacation, even if it means extending their training a week?

No, this is not a requirement. ABFM strongly encourages that the resident preserve at least one week to be used later in the year, but that is a decision the Program Director can make with the resident. This decision must fit within each institution's rules, as well as the needs of the resident and the program. It is often helpful for a Program Director to support a resident through this decision and help them understand that leave extensions are not bad, nor prolonged, in most situations, and that the resident's immediate needs should remain the priority.

5. If we let residents take eight (8) weeks of family leave and up to four (4) weeks of vacation, it seems that they would miss core rotations? Can Family Leave come out of elective time?

All specific curricular decisions and rotation planning decisions need to be made at the local level. We recommend that Program Directors make every attempt to adjust a resident's schedule to have their Family Leave coincide with elective, or more individually based rotations (e.g. subspecialty, community medicine, and similar) so as to create less disruption to core inpatient rotations and others that would impact more of their peers.

6. Can a resident returning from Family Leave be promoted to the next PGY level if the program director/CCC determines this is appropriate?

A resident can always request to extend their residency to optimize their clinical training, as long as the program and institution are supportive of this decision. Decisions about adequacy of patients and experiences, as well as funding to do so, are left to be determined at the program level.

7. How does this leave policy apply for end-of-year/end-of-training time window? Can a resident graduate while on Family Leave?

Yes. Contrary to popular belief, ABFM has never had a policy that required the resident to be back in training for the last week(s) of their residency. A resident can graduate while on Family Leave, as long as they have met the requirement for 40 weeks of continuity practice in their final year and have had 1,000 hours in continuity practice over the course of their residency training. In cases in which the Family Leave occurs at the end of training, the Program Director must sign off in advance that they have met all ACGME requirements and are ready for autonomous practice.

8. Does bereavement leave fall under this policy?

With respect to bereavement leave, the answer will depend on what your local institutional policies indicate. If this is part of a longer Family Leave to care for a terminally ill family member, or results in a substantial mental health issue that you feel necessitates the resident being out longer, you may choose to use Family Leave. Those types of decisions need to be made at the program level.

Questions Regarding Family Leave versus Other Types of Leave

9. Does time for Other Leave continue to fall under the previous 30 calendar day limit? How does this policy relate to time allowed for residents to take vacation or sick leave each year?

Yes. The Time Away from Residency/Family Leave policy refers only to the time allowable for residents to take Family Leave for significant events like the addition of a child to the family, major health problems requiring prolonged time out of training, or caring for a family member with a significant illness. Other leave, which includes any time that your program provides for residents to be off for any other reason (sick leave, vacation time, educational leave, holidays, wellness days, etc.) must not exceed four (4) weeks or 30 days per calendar year. The decision to calculate this time in weeks or days should be consistent with your local leave policies. At the ABFM RTM system level, all leave is calculated as days.

A resident in need of Family Leave could be granted up to four (4) weeks for Other Leave (as allowed by the program's policies) to link with the eight (8) weeks attributable to Family Leave in order to achieve up to twelve (12) weeks away from the program within a given academic year without needing to extend their residency.

Questions Related to Continuity Requirements

10. Under this policy, are programs are still required to have residents complete 40 weeks continuity clinic per each PGY year?

Yes. Within a given academic year, a resident can be away from the program as described in the Time Away from Residency/Family Leave policy and still maintain their ABFM board eligibility without an extension of training, as long as they are meeting the 40-week continuity requirement, which will still be necessary for ABFM board eligibility even under July 2023 ACGME requirements for Family Medicine residency. They will also need to show a minimum of 1,000 hours spent in care of patients in a continuity clinic setting.

ABFM realizes that there is variation in curricular design and rotations across programs, and that away rotations and night float do present challenges to achieving the 40-week requirement. ABFM counts on the Program Director and faculty to work on specific curricular needs for a resident during the year in which they need to take Family Leave, in order to move rotations such as away electives and those requiring night float to be in alternate years, when possible. Careful planning for sufficient clinic sessions and patient visits before and after the Family Leave should be able to accommodate this. When this is not possible, or if it is not desirable from the resident's perspective, you may choose to extend the resident's training. Alternatively, a resident may choose to take a shorter Family Leave period in lieu of a training extension if curricular requirements cannot accommodate the leave.

11. If we are in one of the pilot programs that do not currently require 40 weeks of continuity clinic, do we need to discuss with ABFM how many weeks of clinic will be required?

Yes, we would be happy to look at the plans proposed by the pilot programs for how they will handle each of these situations to ensure shared understanding and consistency.

Questions Regarding Documentation

12. Is ABFM going to ask us to submit information on residents who have taken Family Leave and if so, will there be an evaluation of the reason for the leave by ABFM?

Yes, all programs will need to submit information about any resident that has been granted a period of Family Leave, even when that time does not require extension of training, as this will help us understand and inform decisions about the impact of these policies on residency training.

13. What sort of documentation is expected by the program for a resident whose time away from training is only for Other Leave (vacation, short term personal illness, educational leave, etc.)?

It is not necessary to document time away from training for Other Leave as long as it does not exceed the allowed 4 week maximum.

14. How and when should leave be documented in RTM? Is there a time period from the beginning of leave?

Leave time should be added to the resident profile in RTM by clicking the "Add Leave or Training Extension Record" button in the appropriate PGY training record. These records must be added during the training year in which the leave was taken and before the resident is advanced to the next training level.

15. I have a resident that utilized 8 weeks of family leave and 2 weeks of other leave for maternity reasons at the end of her PGY2 and it crosses her advancement date to PGY3. How do I enter this in RTM?

This leave will have to be entered as two separate records. For example, if the leave time was from June 1, 2022, to August 9, 2022, and the resident would normally advance to a PGY3 status on July 1, the first leave record would be entered as June 1, 2022, to June 30, 2022, with zero PTO days, 30 family leave days, and zero extension days. You would then enter a normal PGY3 training record of July 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023. Then, enter the second leave record of July 1, 2022, to August 9, 2022, with 14 days of PTO, 26 days of family leave, and zero extension days. This accounts for the total time away of 70 days and does not require the resident to extend training at this point.

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Miscellaneous Questions

16. What about residents who plan to seek certification from AOBFP rather than ABFM?

This policy relates only to certification eligibility with the American Board of Family Medicine and has not been coordinated with the American Osteopathic Board of Family Physicians (AOBFP). Residents interested in AOBFP certification will need to refer to the policies under that certifying organization. If residents are seeking dual board certification, then following the ABFM Time Away from Residency/Family Leave requirements will be necessary.

17. I have a resident who is completing their training on a part-time schedule. How does this policy work in that situation?

There are many ways in which programs approach part-time training. If you have this situation, please contact Ms. Kathy Botner (kbotner@theabfm.org) to help work through your individual case.