

Eligibility, exposure, and application timing for pain medicine fellowship in family medicine residency

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The pain fellowship application opens in mid-PGY-2, often before family medicine residents have had meaningful pain exposure.

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1 BACKGROUND

- Family medicine physicians are **eligible** for accredited pain medicine fellowship and ABFM Pain Medicine CAQ, yet remain uncommon among applicants.
- **Question:** does application-cycle timing compound limited interest and exposure during residency?

2 METHODS

- Cross-sectional documentary analysis of **six U.S. sources** through Jul 30, 2026: ABFM certification requirements; two AAMC 2027 ERAS timeline sources; three peer-reviewed national reports.
- Abstracted eligibility, applicant counts, fellowship preferences, curricular exposure, and application dates; aligned with a **three-year** FM residency.

This study used publicly available aggregate data containing no patient-identifiable information and was reviewed and approved by the Hunterdon Medical Center Institutional Review Board.

3 RESULTS

Family medicine share of ERAS Pain Medicine applicants, 2019–2023

1.6%

41 of 2,568 · annual range 1.0–2.2%

FM residents selecting pain management as fellowship interest

0.46%

4 of 871 · vs 294 (33.8%) sports medicine

Mean chronic-pain education across FM residencies

33 h

range 2–180 hours



Pathway: ABFM permits family physicians to pursue the Pain Medicine Certificate of Added Qualification (CAQ) after 12 months in ACGME-accredited fellowship training.

The application window opens mid-PGY-2. 2027 ERAS: apply from Nov 12; programs review from Dec 2. ABFM permits the Pain Medicine CAQ after 12 months of ACGME-accredited fellowship.

4 DISCUSSION

- The pathway is **formally available but minimally visible**.
- The window opens in **mid-PGY-2**, often before meaningful elective exposure.
- These data cannot establish causation but identify actionable targets.
- Whether earlier visibility of eligibility broadens the applicant pool **remains untested**.

Actionable targets for FM programs

- Identify interest during PGY-1
- Mentorship + an early PGY-2 pain elective
- Align letters with the November opening

5 REFERENCES

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