

Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation (Physiatry) basic level

Overview

Physiatry, also called physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), is a medical specialty that primarily uses physical means to help in diagnosis, healing, and rehabilitation. Physiatrists specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of patients with chronic illness (e.g., stroke) or injury (e.g., spinal cord, brain), acute and chronic pain, and musculoskeletal injuries (e.g., sports-, work-related). Many physiatrists specialize in the treatment of back pain.

What is physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R)?

Physiatrists treat the whole person. They address the patient's physical, emotional, and social needs during rehabilitation. Physiatrists direct the rehabilitation team that may include physical or occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, social workers, athletic trainers, and more.

PM&R doctors work in a variety of settings including clinics, hospitals, and rehabilitation centers.

How can PM&R help me?

PM&R can help patients with chronic disease, pain, or disabilities toward optimal function, thus improving recovery and quality of life. Physiatrists diagnose and treat problems of the musculoskeletal system, including back and neck pain, spinal cord injury, and other conditions.

With the use of physical agents and therapeutic exercise, rehabilitation can help patients in the following ways to:

- reduce pain
- improve quality of life for those with temporary or severe impairment
- learn how to use assistive devices (e.g., braces, wheelchairs, etc.)

During rehabilitation, PM&R doctors care for patients facing physical impairment and its accompanying emotional challenges as well.

About your office visit

Physiatrists plan treatment based on a thorough evaluation of the patient's medical history, and/or neurological reports, X-rays, and laboratory tests. They can use electromyography (EMG) and nerve conduction tests to evaluate nerve and muscle function. PM&R treatment may include any combination of the following: medication, physical therapy, occupational therapy, massage, exercise, epidural steroid injections, and more.

In coordination with the rehabilitation team, the goal is to improve function in your daily activities. Your progress is carefully tracked until your symptoms have resolved or stabilized. In some cases, symptoms progress, indicating surgery may be needed. If so, your PM&R doctor will refer you to a Mayfield neurosurgeon for further evaluation.

What training do PM&R doctors have?

A PM&R doctor completes 4 years of medical school and at least 4 more years of residency training in this field. Certification is through the American Board of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation.

Sources & links

If you have more questions, please contact the Mayfield Spine Institute at 800-325-7787 or 513-221-1100. Additional information is available on the web at the American Academy of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation www.aapmr.org.

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