

ABIM Time Away from Training

The American Board of Internal Medicine (ABIM) has several policies regarding internal medicine resident time away from training published on their website. Program directors and trainees have reported some confusion in interpreting these policies.

As of the date of this document, the policies in question are the following:

Leave of Absence and Vacation

Up to one month per academic year is permitted for time away from training, which includes vacation, illness, parental or family leave, or pregnancy-related disabilities. Training must be extended to make up any absences exceeding one month per year of training unless the Deficits in Required Training Time policy is used and approved. Vacation leave is essential and should not be forfeited or postponed in any year of training and cannot be used to reduce the total required training period. ABIM recognizes that leave policies vary from institution to institution and expects the program director to apply his/her local requirements within these guidelines to ensure trainees have completed the requisite period of training.

ABIM views educational leave, which would include attendance at training-related seminars, courses, interviews for subsequent training positions, etc., as bona fide educational experiences or duties essential for the continuity of education from internal medicine to a subspecialty and, therefore, need not be counted as part of the one-month allocation for leave time in the academic year for purposes of tracking training time for ABIM.

Deficits in Required Training Time

ABIM recognizes that delays or interruptions may arise during training such that the required training cannot be completed within the standard total training time for the training type. In such circumstances, if the trainee's program director and clinical competency committee attest to ABIM that the trainee has achieved required competence with a deficit of less than one month, extended training may not be required. Only program directors may request that ABIM apply the Deficits in Required Training Time policy on a trainee's behalf, and such a request may only be made during the trainee's final year of training. Program directors may request a deficit in training time when submitting evaluations for the final year of standard training via FasTrack, subject to ABIM review.

The Deficits in Required Training Time policy is not intended to be used to shorten training before the end of the academic year.

How does ABIM define “a month”?

ABIM recognizes that program schedules vary widely and often do not conform to calendar months. To maximize program flexibility, ABIM will consider a month to include up to 5 weeks of training time. This definition of one month as five weeks (or 35 days) applies to both Leave of Absence/Vacation and Deficits in Required Training.

Is “one month per training year” cumulative or does leave need to be accounted for by PGY year?

The one month of allowed time away from training includes both scheduled time (vacation) and unscheduled time (sick time, parental leave, etc). As mentioned in the policy, vacation time is considered essential and shouldn't be forfeited in any year. If the amount of vacation is less than the total allowed (i.e. five weeks), any remaining time away can be allocated cumulatively over the entirety of training if approved by the program director.

When a resident requires time away from the program, the timing of promotion from one PGY level to the next is at the program director's discretion and may be based upon clinical performance or local GME policy. Programs may choose to extend the current PGY year to encompass 12 months and consider shortening the final year of training, or can promote residents on cycle and extend the final PGY year if needed.

Am I required to give residents four to five weeks of leave based upon this policy?

No. This policy sets maximum guidelines for time away from training to meet ABIM standards. Individual program or institutional policies may have policies that are more limited or restrictive.

Our local policy requires that residents use “personal days” or “CME days” to attend conferences. Does this conflict with the ABIM policy?

No. Although ABIM allows programs to include interviews, conferences, and other experiences which further the resident's education and/or career development in training time, local policies may supercede.

How does the Deficits in Required Training Time policy extend the Leave of Absence and Vacation policy?

If a resident exceeds the limit of time away allowed by the Leave of Absence and Vacation policy, which would be a total of 15 weeks (105 days) over three years of training, the program director may, at his or her discretion and with the approval of the clinical competence committee, consider applying the Deficits in Required Training Policy. This would allow the resident to have an additional five weeks of leave during their entirety of training. The CCC should assess the resident's competence in all six competencies and if approved the request can be submitted via the FasTrack system. Between leave of absence and deficits in required training, a resident may be absent for 140 days if the CCC deems the resident to be competent (per ABIM policy) Absences exceeding 140 days for a competent resident will require extension of training.

Does the type of rotation missed by the resident affect the amount of time required to complete training? Does it matter whether this was a call rotation including weekends, or a non-call rotation?

Program directors are responsible for addressing curricular needs of their residents, and the content of any extension of training is at the program's discretion. ABIM policies do not differentiate between types or intensities of rotation assignments. Dates of extension of training should be based upon time away from the program. To reduce focus on whether the missed training time involved a rotation that includes five days versus six days of work each week, it is recommended that extended (multi-week) blocks of time away be tracked (and made up) by number of weeks away rather than by individual days missed.

A resident had a late start due to a visa delay. Can I utilize the Deficits in Required Training Time policy to allow them to finish on time?

Yes, subject to the requirements of the Deficits in Required Training Time Policy.

Are programs required to provide residents with four weeks of vacation or eight weeks of leave, based upon these policies?

No. These policies define the maximum amount of leave allowed by ABIM before extension of training is required. Individual programs or institutions may have policies that are more restrictive regarding training extensions and time away from programs. ABIM does not have requirements for the number of weeks of vacation per year.

Does time spent taking licensing exams (i.e. Step / Level 3) or an ABIM board preparation course need to be considered a leave of absence?

Licensing exams, board preparation courses, and other similar experiences could be considered as Educational Leave as noted in ABIM's policy, and thus may be considered as included in training time. However, individual institutional policies may be more restrictive.

A resident needs to leave early to attend orientation for their fellowship program. Can I utilize the Deficits in Required Training Time policy to accommodate this request?

No. The Deficits in Required Training Time policy is designed to allow residents who require a time limited LOA during training to finish on time. It is not to be used to allow residents to finish training in less than 36 calendar months from the start of residency to attend fellowship orientation, start employment early, or allow moonlighting time.

A resident would like to use vacation time or personal days at the end of their training to leave early for a fellowship or employment position. Is this allowed?

Yes. Vacation time is allowed time away from the program which residents can use for any purpose, adhering to local institutional and program policies. However, the program may not move up the graduation date for a trainee who is finishing "on cycle" and taking two weeks of vacation at the end. The end date would remain June 30 rather than June 16.

Vignette 1

My program offers three weeks of vacation and one week of personal leave per year. A resident is granted a parental leave after birth of a child. How much time away from training is allowed without extending training?

In the scenario presented, the program allocates four weeks of scheduled time away from the program annually. As a month is defined as five weeks for the purposes of these policies, the program can allow a maximum of three weeks of additional leave time over the three-year training program. If the program director / CCC deems the resident ready to practice independently at the end of training, the Deficits in Training Time policy would allow shortening of training by an additional five weeks. Therefore, the resident could be allowed a maximum of eight weeks parental leave without extension of training. Vacation or personal time could be utilized to extend this further if desired. Any additional unscheduled time away during the remaining of training would require extension. However, local policies may be more restrictive.

- Leave of Absence and Vacation time allows = 5 weeks (35 days) per year x 3 years = 105 days
- The Deficits in Required Training allows = 5 weeks (35 days)
- Total time allowed to be missed by the ABIM Policies = 105 days + 35 days = 140 days*
*assuming the CCC deems the resident competent

In this program example:

- Vacation time/Personal leave = 4 weeks (28 days) x 3 years = 84 days
- Answer: 140 days allowed by the ABIM – 84 vacation time taken by the resident = 56 days
- The resident is allowed an additional 56 days (8 weeks) off for parental leave without extending training.

Vignette 2

In a similar scenario, a resident takes 12 weeks of parental leave during their PGY-1 year of a 3 year training program. How much extension of training will he or she require? In what PGY year does that extension occur?

Using the same explanation as Vignette 1, ABIM would allow eight weeks of leave before extension is required, thus the resident would require a minimum of four weeks of extension. Local policies may be more restrictive, requiring additional extension of training. It is the program director / CCC's discretion whether the resident's PGY-1 year is extended to encompass a full 12 months, or promotion is "on cycle" and the extension occurs in the PGY-3 year.

- Leave of Absence and Vacation time allows = 5 weeks (35 days) per year x 3 years = 105 days
 - The Deficits in Required Training allows = 5 weeks (35 days)
 - Total time allowed to be missed by the ABIM = 105 days + 35 days = 140 days*
- *assuming the CCC deems the resident competent

In Vignette 2:

- Vacation time/Personal leave = 4 weeks (28 days) x 3 years = 84 days
- Answer: 140 days allowed by the ABIM – 84 vacation time taken by the resident = 56 days
- The resident is allowed an additional 56 days (8 weeks) off for parental leave
- For the 12 weeks that were taken off, they would need to extend by 4 weeks or 28 days.
- PD can decide which year to require the 4 weeks of extension.

Vignette 3

A resident in an endocrinology fellowship takes 12 weeks of parental leave during the PGY-4 (F1) year of a two-year training program. The program offers four weeks of vacation / sick time. How much extension of training will she require? In what PGY year does that extension occur?

Similar to Vignette 2, time away from programs is limited to five weeks per training year. The resident will take four weeks of vacation each year. In this case, the fellow would be allowed two weeks of additional leave over two years of training. If the Shortening of Training policy is applied, the fellow could miss five more weeks of training, or seven weeks total. Hence, a minimum of five weeks would need to be extended in this case (12 weeks leave taken minus seven weeks leave allowable without extending training). Local policies may be more restrictive, requiring additional extension of training. It is the program director / CCC's discretion whether the resident's PGY-4 year is extended to encompass a full 12 months, or promotion is "on cycle" and the extension occurs in the PGY-5 year.

- Leave of Absence and Vacation time allows = 5 weeks (35 days) per year x 2 years = 70 days
 - The Deficits in Required Training allows = 5 weeks (35 days)
 - Total time allowed to be missed by the ABIM = 70 days + 35 days = 105 days*
- *assuming the CCC deems the fellow competent

In Vignette 3:

- Vacation time/Personal leave = 4 weeks (28 days) x 2 years = 56 days
- Answer: 105 days allowed by the ABIM – 56 vacation time taken by the resident = 49 days
- The resident is allowed an additional 49 days (7 weeks) off for parental leave
- For the 12 weeks that were taken off they would need to extend by 5 weeks or 35 days.
- PD can decide which year to require the 5 weeks of extension.

Vignette 4

A resident requires an H1-B visa which is not approved for him to begin training until July 18 of his intern year. During his PGY1 year, he takes three weeks of vacation and misses two additional weeks (14 days) for a minor emergency surgery. Can he be promoted to PGY2 as of July 2019? If he has five weeks off for vacation and other reasons during each of his subsequent years of training, will he require an extension of training prior to graduating as a three year trainee?

ABIM indicates that the 17 days he missed from the beginning of his designated intern year can count as “time away from training”. In this example, the trainee had an additional 5 weeks (35 days) away as a PGY1 and 10 weeks (70 days) away between PGY2 and PGY3. So the 17 days that he missed at the beginning is beyond the 15 week (105 days) limit for 3 years. However, if the CCC deems the resident competent, those 17 days would not need to be made up. It is the PD’s discretion whether this trainee is permitted to advance to the PGY2 level on July 1, 2019 (allowing a shortened PGY1 year) or whether promotion is delayed until July 18, 2019. In the latter case, the shortening of training would be possible for the PGY3 year so that graduation could still occur on June 30, 2021.

In Vignette 3:

- Vacation/sick/personal leave = 5 weeks (35 days) X 3 years = 105 days
- 17 days missed due to Visa issues
- 140 days allowed by ABIM – 122 days of training missed, so trainee requires no extension of training if meeting CCC competency standards.