

UNITED COUNCIL  
FOR  
NEUROLOGIC  
SUBSPECIALTIES

# SUBSPECIALTY SPONSORING ORGANIZATION HANDBOOK

[WWW.UCNS.ORG](http://WWW.UCNS.ORG)

# Subspecialty Sponsoring Organization Handbook

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# 1. UCNS Overview

## a. Mission & Vision

### *UCNS Mission*

To promote high quality patient-centered care through accreditation of training programs and certification of physicians in neurologic subspecialties.

### *UCNS Vision*

To help small neurologic subspecialties develop credibility and grow.

## b. History

Advances in neuroscience were occurring at an explosive rate, giving birth to innovative technologies and treatments which promised dramatic improvements in neurologic care. By 2000, 75 percent of neurology residents sought to enter fellowship programs to develop subspecialty expertise. Although there were abundant opportunities for neurology fellowships, training requirements varied considerably. Most fellowships were not accredited, and their graduates were not certified. To provide a means for formal recognition of emerging neurologic subspecialties and an opportunity to improve training for subspecialties through the development of training and clinical competence standards, the leaders in the field of Neurology collaborated to support and nurture neurologic subspecialties.

### **2001**

The American Academy of Neurology developed the Commission on Subspecialty Certification comprised of five leading neurology organizations with a common interest of supporting and nurturing neurologic subspecialties:

- American Academy of Neurology
- American Neurological Association
- Association of University Professors of Neurology
- Child Neurology Society
- Professors of Child Neurology

### **2002**

The five founding parent organizations established the structure, function, and budget for an accrediting and certifying body for emerging subspecialties

### **2003**

The United Council for Neurologic Subspecialties (UCNS) was incorporated as [an independent 501\(c\)\(6\) nonprofit organization](#).

### **c. Parent Organizations**

The five founding parent organizations have an ongoing role in the governance of the UCNS. Each parent organization nominates a voting representative to the nine-member board of directors and hold the majority of voting seats ensuring that the leading neurology organizations continue to have a majority stake in the governance of the UCNS. They are also the source of nominations to the Certification and Accreditation Councils, the bodies that are responsible for the oversight of the respective UCNS programs.

### **d. Board of Directors**

The [UCNS Board of Directors](#) is comprised of representatives nominated by each of the parent organizations, subspecialty sponsoring organizations, liaisons from the American Board of Psychiatry & Neurology and Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, and executive directors of the parent organizations who serve in an ex-officio capacity. The Board provides the overall governance for the organization.

### **e. Councils**

The [Certification and Accreditation Councils](#) provide peer oversight of UCNS accreditation and certification activities. Council member nominations are submitted by the five parent organizations and the nominations are reviewed and approved by the UCNS Board Chair. Councils report to the UCNS Board of Directors.

## **2. UCNS Role**

UCNS was established to provide emerging neurologic subspecialties an opportunity to offer a credible accreditation and certification process that is developed and maintained by the leading organizations and experts in the field of neurology and has the ongoing leadership and involvement of volunteers from the parent and sponsoring organizations.

### **a. Policies**

UCNS establishes the [policies](#) and expert oversight of the certification and accreditation process:

- Develops and maintains the UCNS general eligibility requirements for certification and common program requirements for training program accreditation
- Provides expert peer-reviewed Council oversight of all accrediting and certifying activities to ensure compliance with the established policies and procedures

### **b. Standards**

UCNS provides industry-recognized and respected standards

- Board of Directors, Council, and committee volunteers represent the leading neurology and subspecialty organizations

- Certification and accreditation standards, though modeled after American Board of Medical Specialties and Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education standards, are scaled to ensure successful administration for smaller subspecialties

### **c. Infrastructure**

UCNS provides the infrastructure to administer the accreditation and certification activities:

- Administers the [initial certification](#), [continuous-certification](#), and [accreditation](#) processes for all UCNS-recognized neurologic subspecialties with a professional staff of four full-time employees and legal and accounting support of the AAN
- Coordinates the certification examination development cycle for all subspecialty initial exams, continuous-certification activities, and over 100 volunteers who are involved in the process
- Manages the accreditation application and annual reporting process to ensure program compliance with the established requirements and policies
- Maintains records for all UCNS diplomates, accredited programs, and applicants
- Secures and manages the technical platforms needed to successfully administer certification and accreditation activities
- Pays expenses related to Council member, exam committee member, and voting Board member related meeting and/or travel expense

### **d. Promotion and Communication**

UCNS provides promotion for increased awareness of diplomates and accredited training programs:

- Maintains online directories for easy identification of diplomates and accredited programs
- Participates and exhibits at American Academy of Neurology and targeted subspecialty society meetings
- Distributes press releases announcing new diplomates and accredited training programs through UCNS, parent, and sponsoring organization communication channels
- Provides monthly UCNS Updates through UCNS email distribution list (Circulation 5,000+)
- Develops subspecialty-specific certification and accreditation information for distribution at subspecialty society meetings

### **e. Ongoing Subspecialty Review and Status Updates**

UCNS monitors subspecialty growth and trends and provides sponsoring organizations with annual updates on subspecialty certification and accreditation status including:

- Participation and outcomes for certification examinations
- Retention and growth of certified diplomates and accredited fellowship programs
- Enrollment in fellowship programs

## **f. Staff**

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## **3. Subspecialty Sponsoring Organizations**

UCNS subspecialty recognition begins with an [application process](#) that is initiated by one or more subspecialty sponsoring organizations. Through this application process emerging neurologic subspecialties have the opportunity to strategically develop and define the standards of competence for physicians and the measure of excellence for training programs in their subspecialty field. Once approved, changes to subspecialty-specific certification and accreditation criteria can only be initiated by the sponsoring organizations and/or their designated UCNS committees or task forces.

### **a. Current Sponsoring Organizations**

#### **Autonomic Disorders**

- [American Autonomic Society](#)
- [AAN Autonomic Disorders Section](#)

#### **Behavioral Neurology & Neuropsychiatry**

- [American Neuropsychiatric Association](#)
- [Society for Behavioral and Cognitive Neurology](#)

#### **Clinical Neuromuscular Pathology**

- [AAN Neuromuscular Section](#)

## Geriatric Neurology

- [AAN Geriatric Neurology Section](#)

## Headache Medicine

- [American Headache Society](#)
- [AAN Headache & Facial Pain Section](#)

## Neurocritical Care

- [Neurocritical Care Society](#)
- [AAN Critical Care & Emergency Neurology Section](#)

## Neuroimaging

- [American Society of Neuroimaging](#)

## Neuro-oncology

- [AAN Neuro-oncology Section](#)

### **b. Roles and Responsibilities**

Subspecialty sponsoring organizations have an ongoing active role in developing, maintaining, and updating the standards for their respective subspecialty and have a voice in the governance of the UCNS through representation on the UCNS Board of Directors. Subspecialties with more than one sponsoring organization work together for united representation on behalf of the subspecialty.

Sponsoring organizations begin the **subspecialty recognition process**:

- Coordinate and submit the subspecialty recognition application to the UCNS
- Develop and propose the subspecialty core curriculum for training programs
- Develop and propose the subspecialty training program requirements
- Develop and propose the subspecialty content outline for certification examinations

Sponsoring organizations are the **source of nominations** for subspecialty representation:

- One seat on the [UCNS Board of Directors](#), rotates on a two-year voting/non-voting basis
- [Ten subject matter experts](#) who are responsible for the developing and updating the subspecialty's certification examination, annual continuous-certification (C-cert) quiz, and identification of journal articles for the subspecialty's annual C-cert reading list
- Three experts who serve on the Training Program Review Task Force that reviews and updates training requirements a minimum of once every five years
- Three representatives who make up the Milestones Development Task Force that develops the subspecialty's training program milestones

Sponsoring organizations are the **source of subspecialty-specific change**:

- Propose [subspecialty training requirements](#) changes, as needed
- Propose [certification eligibility requirements](#) changes, as needed

### **c. Proposing Subspecialty-Specific Criteria Changes**

Sponsoring organizations are responsible for developing and maintaining the subspecialty-specific requirements and criteria for their subspecialty's certification and accreditation programs. Requirements outlined in the General Eligibility Requirements for certification and Program Requirements for training programs can be changed only at the recommendation of the relevant Council and approved by the Board of Directors after a 30-day comment period. The current certification eligibility and program requirements for each subspecialty are available on the UCNS website.

Changes to subspecialty-specific requirements may be proposed in writing to the UCNS at any time by the sponsoring organization(s). Proposed changes are reviewed by the respective Council before going to the Board of Directors for consideration. If approved, the subspecialty's documents will be updated to reflect the changes.

### **d. Adding Sponsoring Organizations Post-recognition**

In 2019, the UCNS created a pathway for qualifying organizational sponsors to be added after the initial subspecialty recognition application has been submitted. After approval of an initial subspecialty application for recognition, other medical associations or societies, AAN subspecialty sections, or special interest groups of a primary neurological association or society may apply to be included as a sponsoring organization for the subspecialty. They must:

1. Represent the interests of the subspecialty
2. Provide a letter requesting membership as a sponsoring organization of the subspecialty
3. Provide a letter supporting membership from the current subspecialty sponsoring organization(s)
4. Endorse the program requirements, core content, and practice track requirements in place at the time of application, and
5. Agree to pay their portion of the annual sponsoring organization fee

Approval of any requests will be determined by the UCNS Board of Directors.

### **e. Annual sponsoring organization fee**

Sponsoring organizations pay a one-time application fee at the time of the initial subspecialty application submission and agree to pay an annual administrative fee to the UCNS if subspecialty recognition is approved. The annual administrative fee is per subspecialty and is divided between a subspecialty's sponsoring organizations. Fees (subject to change):

- \$1,000 application fee (one-time fee paid at time of application submission)
- \$1,000 annual administrative fee

Fees will be billed annually in January of each year with payment due in full by March 1<sup>st</sup>.



#### **f. Promotion of subspecialty certification and accreditation**

Fostering the growth of emerging subspecialties requires a partnership with the sponsoring organization to communicate and support the certification and accreditation programs that are administered on behalf of the subspecialty by the UCNS. The UCNS provides sponsoring organizations with information that can be distributed through the sponsoring organizations' communication channels:

- Include UCNS information on sponsoring organization website
- Distribute UCNS messaging through sponsoring organization communication channels
- Distribute UCNS certification/accreditation information at subspecialty society meetings
- Request UCNS articles relating to certification/accreditation for inclusion in society newsletter(s)
- Provide complimentary advertising space for UCNS to promote certification/accreditation opportunities (i.e., society journal, newsletter, e-newsletter, website, annual meeting program book, etc.)

#### **g. Nomination of subspecialty representatives**

UCNS will reach out annually to all UCNS-recognized subspecialties with a call for volunteers. Sponsoring organizations are responsible for identifying and nominating the subject matter experts and leaders who will be responsible for representing their subspecialty in the important roles on the [Board of Directors](#), [Certification Examination Committee](#), and Task Forces. The appendices includes job descriptions and detailed information about the committee responsibilities and terms.

#### **h. Active Volunteer Participation**

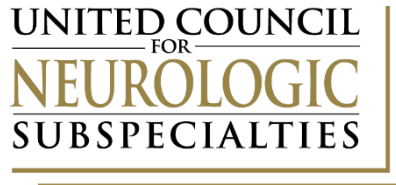
The volunteer job descriptions include an estimate of the time commitment for Board and committee members. When making nominations to fill volunteer seats, it is important that sponsoring organizations nominate volunteers who have the expertise needed to fill the volunteer role and also have the ability to commit to the time needed to participate and complete volunteer assignments as applicable. All UCNS volunteers must complete and submit a [Conflict of Interest Disclosure Statement](#).

## **4. Appendices – Volunteer Job Descriptions**

Appendix A – Non-Voting Board Member

Appendix B – Voting Board Member

Appendix C – Certification Examination Committee Member



## Appendix A

# Non-Voting Neurological Subspecialty Board Member Job Description

*Serves as a subspecialty representative to the UCNS Board of Directors and in this role fully supports the organization's mission.*

### **ESTIMATED TIME COMMITMENT:**

Two 1-2 hour conference call meetings (winter and summer), 1-2 hours of electronic review of information and documents prior to each meeting, one half-day face-to-face meeting in the spring (in conjunction with the AAN Annual Meeting and destination), and one full day face-to-face meeting in the fall of each year at UCNS headquarters in Minneapolis, MN.

**FINANCIAL:** UCNS does not pay travel or lodging related expenses for non-voting members to attend face-to-face meetings; however, there is the option for participation in all meetings via conference call.

**TERM:** 2-3 years

### **SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES:**

1. Provide feedback and insights to assist with developing strategic plan and direction.
2. Promote the UCNS nationally.
3. Perform duties in a timely and efficient manner and work with designated groups to facilitate timely responses.
4. Decisions are made in the best interest of the organization.

### **DESIRED SKILLS AND ABILITIES:**

UCNS-certified in the representative subspecialty, demonstrated leadership, knowledge of the UCNS activities and mission, highly refined communications skills, motivator, organizational experience, ability to commit time as needed, respect of colleagues, and well-defined and articulated vision and goals.

## Voting Neurological Subspecialty Board Member Director Job Description

*Serves as a subspecialty representative to the UCNS Board of Directors and in this role fully supports the organization's mission.*

### **ESTIMATED TIME COMMITMENT:**

Two 1-2 hour conference call meetings (winter and summer, 1-2 hours of electronic review of information and documents prior to each meeting, one half-day face-to-face meeting in the spring (in conjunction with the AAN Annual Meeting and destination), and one full day face-to-face meeting in the fall of each year at UCNS headquarters in Minneapolis, MN.

**FINANCIAL:** UCNS pays travel and lodging related expenses for voting members to attend face-to-face meetings. The only exception is the spring meeting in the event a voting director is also a registered attendee for the AAN Annual Meeting.

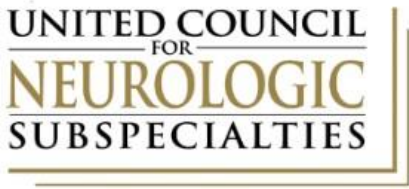
**TERM:** 2 years

### **SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES:**

1. Annually review the UCNS business plan; assist with developing strategic plan and direction.
2. Assist with the review and revision of UCNS policies and procedures.
3. Review decisions affecting certification exams and accreditation programs.
4. Promote the UCNS nationally.
5. Perform duties in a timely and efficient manner and work with designated groups to facilitate timely responses.
6. Decisions are made in the best interest of the organization.

### **DESIRED SKILLS AND ABILITIES:**

UCNS-certified in the representative subspecialty, demonstrated leadership, knowledge of the UCNS activities and mission, highly refined communications skills, motivator, organizational experience, ability to commit time as needed, respect of colleagues, and well-defined and articulated vision and goals.



## Appendix C

# Certification Examination Committee Job Description

*Examination committee members are responsible for the development of the subspecialty certification examinations and Continuous-certification (C-cert) annual reading list and quizzes. Each committee is comprised of 10 subspecialty experts who are appointed by the subspecialty's sponsoring organization(s). Appointments are reviewed for approval by the Certification Council. All examination committees report to the Certification Council.*

**ESTIMATED TIME COMMITMENT:** 20-25 hours per initial certification examination (biennial); 5 hours per annual C-cert quiz and journal article reading list selection.

**TERM:** 2-3 years, terms may be renewed once

**FINANCIAL:** UCNS pays any travel and lodging expenses for members if the committee is required to conduct business in a face-to-face meeting.

**ELIGIBILITY:** Must be able to meet the same eligibility criteria as applicants who apply to sit for the certification examination. Committee members must be UCNS-certified in the subspecialty or pass the subspecialty certification examination via an essay examination within six months of appointment. Examination committee members will have their initial examination application fee and/or annual C-cert fee waived while actively serving on the committee. Required C-cert assessment activities will also be waived during their term on the committee. Committee members are subject to the annual C-cert fees and activity requirements after their committee term expires.

**DESIRED SKILLS AND ABILITIES:** Expert knowledge in the subspecialty field; previous question writing experience preferred.

### **RESPONSIBILITIES:**

#### General Responsibilities

- Participate in UCNS orientation conference call (1 hour)
- Participate in exam item writing and database training conference call (member will need to spend time learning the database after the conference call)
- Participate in other conference calls as needed during the development of the examinations
- Maintain confidentiality of UCNS certification and C-cert examinations

#### Certification Examination

- Participate in writing, editing, and reviewing/proofing examination questions
- Participate in two post-exam conference calls (1 hour each)
- Member must be able to meet deadlines as outlined in the certification examination timeline  
Deadlines are critical to finalizing the examination in time for publishing

- Participate in proofing of initial certification examinations prior to publishing
- One face-to-face meeting in Minneapolis, MN required for setting initial certification examination pass point every 4-5 examination cycles

#### C-Cert

- Assist in identifying and selecting of up to 10 journal articles annually that support new developments in the subspecialty field
- Participate in writing, editing, and reviewing/proofing the questions that will be used on the annual 25-question C-cert quiz
- Write the C-cert activity learning objectives for *AMA PRA Category 1 Credit™* application

#### **ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES:** (For development of first subspecialty examinations only)

- Develop final examination content outline
- Develop questions for initial certification examination; each member writes a minimum of 30 questions (due in 10-question intervals/3 assignment periods)
- Attend two face-to-face meetings at the UCNS headquarters in Minneapolis, MN (hotel and airfare expenses covered by the UCNS; UCNS travel policy and guidelines will be provided during orientation)
  - First meeting is to review first 100 questions, receive more item writing training, and select questions
  - Second meeting is to review the remaining 200 questions and select the final 200 questions to be used on the certification examination
- Additional meetings may be necessary for setting the pass point for examinations