

FORENSIC PSYCHIATRY FELLOWSHIP: HOW AND WHY TO APPLY

General Subspecialty Overview Questions

What is this subspecialty?

Forensic psychiatry offers specialized training in working at the interface of psychiatry and the legal system. Forensic psychiatrists provide consultation in both criminal and civil cases.

What kinds of patients do psychiatrists in this subspecialty see?

Forensic psychiatrists can have inpatient, outpatient, or combined practices. Most forensic psychiatrists maintain some degree of clinical work to diversify their overall practice.

In what settings do psychiatrists in this subspecialty work?

Forensic psychiatrists more often choose to work in correctional settings or state hospital systems, though that is not absolute. After completing a general psychiatry residency and a forensic psychiatry fellowship, graduates have the ability to work in most clinical settings.

Can I get board (ABPN) certification in this subspecialty?

Yes, the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology (ABPN) offers certification in forensic psychiatry. Graduates from an ACGME-accredited forensic psychiatry fellowship program can sit for the forensic boards after they have successfully passed their general psychiatry boards.

Why Do a Fellowship?

Why do a forensic psychiatry fellowship?

Forensic psychiatry is one of the most challenging and interesting subspecialties in medicine. You solve complex problems and educate attorneys, judges, and juries about psychiatric topics. Completing a fellowship and becoming board certified is an important part of establishing oneself as an expert.

What type of career might you pursue after forensic psychiatry fellowship?

Forensic psychiatrists are well represented in academics, private practice, correctional systems, and state hospital systems. There is considerable flexibility.

Specific Subspecialty Resources

What is the primary national organization for forensic psychiatry?

American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (AAPL) <https://www.aapl.org/>

Should I join and how much does it generally cost?

Interested individuals can join online through the AAPL website: <http://www.aapl.org/join>. The cost is free for medical students and \$55 per year for residents/fellows, as of 2019.

When is the annual meeting typically, and are there trainee scholarships to attend?

AAPL's annual meeting is typically held annually during the last week in October. Trainee scholarships are available: <http://www.aapl.org/rappeport-fellowship>

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Where can I read more about this subspecialty area?

- American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (AAPL) - national organization
<https://www.aapl.org/>
- Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law (JAAPL) - journal
<https://www.jaapl.org/>
- Principles and Practice of Forensic Psychiatry, Third Edition - textbook

Does the national organization for this subspecialty have a mentorship program?

Yes, AAPL has a mentoring program. Formal mentorship is arranged through the Rapoport Fellowship application process, whether applicants win the Rapoport Fellowship or not. Informal mentorship can typically be arranged through attending the AAPL annual meeting.

How can I get more involved in the national organization for my subspecialty?

Attending the AAPL annual meeting is a great way to get involved. Medical students, residents, and fellows can submit abstracts or posters.

Fellowship Application

How do I learn about all the forensic psychiatry fellowships nationally and when should I start learning about them?

AAPL's website has a list of all active programs: <http://www.aapl.org/fellowship>

Start learning about these programs in January the year before you plan to start (~18 months in advance of the anticipated fellowship start date), typically toward the second half of your PGY-3 year. Those who decide later are generally still able to identify available positions, though.

When does the application season typically begin?

Programs generally start accepting applications in late spring (approximately 15 months prior to starting fellowship), so you should ideally be prepared to submit your application by the middle to end of your PGY-3 year. Applications generally include a personal statement, letters of recommendation (including from your current program director), and other documents listed on the individual program's website. There is no overall start date for programs to start accepting applications, so contact each individual program about their timeline.

Is there a formal Match through NRMP?

No, forensic psychiatry fellowships accept applicants directly into their programs.

To how many programs should I apply?

Applicants typically apply to two to five forensic psychiatry programs.

How competitive is getting a fellowship spot?

Generally, it is possible for applicants to secure a fellowship position. However, reputable programs and/or programs in attractive geographical locations are considerably more competitive.

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Is there a research/scholarly activity requirement or suggested rotations that should be completed to get my desired fellowship spot?

Some experience in forensics is preferred. Programs will request a writing sample with applications and it is ideal to have a writing sample related to some forensic experience. The best way to get recognized by the most reputable programs is to reach out to the leadership of individual programs leading up to the application process.

Are there any eligibility requirements or things I must complete before applying/starting?

Applicants must successfully complete their general psychiatry residency (PGY-4 year) before starting a forensic psychiatry fellowship.

What does the interview process typically entail and how many interviews should I attend?

With no match, forensic fellowship programs can offer positions at any time. It is wise to try and arrange interviews in your tentative order of interest. Applicants can cancel remaining interviews once they accept a position from a program.

Is there a difference between ACGME-accredited and non-accredited fellowship programs?

Yes, only graduates from an ACGME-accredited fellowship will be eligible to sit for American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology (ABPN) forensic psychiatry subspecialty board exam.

The Fellowship Year

How long is the fellowship?

Forensic psychiatry fellowships last for one year.

What would I learn during the fellowship year?

The curricula include, but are not limited to, learning case law pertinent to forensic psychiatry, learning how to conduct forensic assessments, refining report writing abilities, and practicing testimony. Fellowship programs typically provide experiences working in correctional and/or state hospital systems. Those experiences can differ from program to program.

In what settings would I work during fellowship?

Programs vary in their available resources and settings, but typically include some combination of correctional settings, state hospitals, and legal clinics. Inquire about the details of each program.

Are there major differences between the fellowship programs, and if so, how do I choose the right program for me?

Programs vary in their training experience and it is generally a good idea to explore this before and during the interview process. Most programs have a similar core training structure, but some programs offer unique experiences or have associations with well-known forensic psychiatrists.