

NABBLM

NORTH AMERICAN BOARD OF
BREASTFEEDING & LACTATION MEDICINE



Professional Conduct Governance Manual

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About NABBLM

Founded in 2024, The North American Board of Breastfeeding & Lactation Medicine (NABBLM) establishes and maintains standards for certification in Breastfeeding and Lactation Medicine (BFLM) to advance excellence in patient care across all medical disciplines.

NABBLM is a 501 (c) (3) organization governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. Committees of the Board: 1. produce the certification exam, 2. manage the Maintenance of Certification (MOC) program, 3. define the requirements for educational programs and applicants, and 4. oversee the applicant review processes and accreditation of educational programs.

NABBLM envisions breastfeeding and lactation medicine as a growing physician specialty with robust training and career pathways yielding greater access to high-quality, collaborative, evidence-based care to all families.

Professional Conduct Governance Manual

Purpose, Scope, & Authority

This Professional Conduct Governance Manual defines the policies and procedures by which NABBLM:

- Upholds standards of professional and ethical conduct among NABBLM-C diplomates
- Reviews and responds to complaints related to certification and professional behavior
- Ensures fair, consistent, and transparent processes for evaluation and disciplinary action
- Protects the integrity and credibility of NABBLM certification
- Promotes public trust in physicians certified in Breastfeeding and Lactation Medicine

This policy applies to:

- All NABBLM-C diplomates
- Individuals applying for NABBLM certification
- Former diplomates when conduct occurred during a period of certification

This policy governs conduct related to:

- Professional and ethical behavior
- Representation and use of NABBLM certification
- Compliance with NABBLM policies, procedures, and requirements
- Activities that may impact the integrity of the certification process

NABBLM has the authority to:

- Establish standards of professional and ethical conduct for diplomates
- Investigate complaints related to NABBLM certification and associated conduct
- Determine whether violations of NABBLM policies have occurred
- Impose appropriate sanctions, including suspension or revocation of certification

NABBLM certification is a voluntary professional credential and does not:

- Confer licensure to practice medicine
- Replace or supersede the authority of state, provincial, or national regulatory bodies
- Serve as a mechanism for adjudicating medical malpractice claims or legal disputes

NABBLM does not function as a regulatory or licensing authority for institutions or training programs.

Principles

All activities under this policy are guided by the following principles:

Fairness and Due Process

All individuals subject to review will be treated with impartiality, provided notice of concerns, and given an opportunity to respond.

Confidentiality

Complaint review processes will be conducted with appropriate confidentiality, consistent with legal and ethical obligations.

Proportionality

Actions and sanctions will be proportionate to the severity, frequency, and impact of the conduct.

Consistency

Policies and procedures will be applied consistently across cases to ensure fairness and credibility.

Transparency

NABBLM will maintain clear, accessible information about its complaint processes and standards.

Organizational Commitment

NABBLM is committed to fostering a professional community of physicians who:

- Deliver evidence-based, compassionate breastfeeding and lactation care
- Engage in ethical and collaborative clinical practice
- Support the health and well-being of lactating individuals and their infants

This governance framework is intended not only to address concerns, but also to promote excellence, accountability, and continuous professional development within the field of Breastfeeding and Lactation Medicine.

Code of Professional Conduct

NABBLM is committed to maintaining a high level of excellence in practice, ethical conduct, and integrity by its Board of Directors, staff, contractors, and diplomates.

As such, a Board Certified Breastfeeding and Lactation Medicine Physician (NABBLM-C)

- should never represent themselves, either directly or indirectly, as anything other than a NABBLM-C unless they hold another license or certification that allows them to do so.
- should practice within the scope of their knowledge, skills, and abilities.
- will not provide services that are legally restricted to another licensed health care professional under applicable state, provincial, or territorial law.
- must remain in good standing relative to governmental requirements as a condition of continued credentialing.
- should take credit, including authorship, only for work they have actually performed and give credit to the contributions of others as warranted.
- shall maintain the professional knowledge and skill level required to ensure that patients and families receive excellent medical care based on current evidence, by participating in and completing NABBLM maintenance of certification requirements.
- shall accept no personal compensation from any party that would influence or require special consideration in the provision of care to any patient.
- shall support and uphold the principles and aims of the International Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes.
- shall cooperate in every reasonable and proper way with other physicians and work with them in the advancement of quality patient care.
- shall be dedicated to providing competent and legally permissible services within the scope of the knowledge and skills of their respective credentials.

- shall provide services with integrity, competence, diligence, and compassion.
- shall provide Breastfeeding and Lactation Medicine information in a manner that is consistent with evidence-based science and medicine.
- shall respect the rights of clients, colleagues, and health professionals, and shall safeguard client confidences within the boundaries of the law.
- shall maintain confidentiality and will not communicate to a third party not involved in that patient's care without the prior written consent of the patient or as required by law.
- shall provide patient care impartially; provide no special privilege to any individual patient based on the patient's race, color, creed, sex, sexual preference, gender identity, age, national origin or handicap.

Applicants or Diplomates will receive a Denial or Revocation of Certification based on the following conduct:

- Presenting fraudulent documents or falsifying information when applying for certification or recertification.
- Failing to comply with testing policies during the exam. This would include any misconduct during the exam that could result in the exam ending or being voided immediately, or any incidents that are brought to light through later audit or review.
- Using a title, designation, credential or license, company name, letterhead, publication, term, title or document which states or implies an ability, relationship or qualification that does not exist.
- Not cooperating with a NABBLM disciplinary investigation or proceeding.
- Attempting to prevent or interfere with a complaint being filed or with a NABBLM disciplinary investigation or proceeding yet to occur.
- Failing to abide by the NABBLM Bylaws or any rules or requirements established by the Board, including, but not limited to, NABBLM's Ethical Code and Professional Conduct.
- Having a license or certificate to practice medicine that is suspended, revoked, or otherwise limited.
- Violating or misusing any of the NABBLM's Intellectual Property Rights.
- Offering financial or other benefit to any director, officer, employee, proctor, or other agent or representative of NABBLM in return for any right, privilege, or benefit which is not usually granted by NABBLM to other similarly situated candidates or persons.
- Failing to comply with the continuing requirements for diplomate status.

Code of Professional Conduct Complaint Policy

This policy outlines the process for receiving, reviewing, and resolving complaints related to candidates and certified physicians in order to:

- Uphold the NABBLM Code of Professional Conduct
- Ensure fair, consistent, and transparent review of concerns
- Protect the integrity and credibility of NABBLM certification
- Maintain public trust in NABBLM-C physicians

Scope of Complaints

NABBLM will review complaints concerning individuals who are applicants for certification or who are current or former diplomates of NABBLM. Complaints may include, but are not limited to:

- Professional misconduct
- Ethical violations
- Misrepresentation of NABBLM certification
- Violations of NABBLM policies, rules, or requirements
- Scope of practice concerns related to Breastfeeding and Lactation Medicine as it pertains to the individual's certification status or representation of expertise
- Fraud or falsification in certification or recertification processes

NABBLM does not adjudicate:

- Medical malpractice or negligence claims

- Employment disputes
- Billing or insurance issues
- General dissatisfaction with clinical outcomes

Such concerns should be directed to appropriate regulatory, legal, or institutional entities.

Who May Submit a Complaint

Complaints may be submitted by:

- Patients or family members
- Healthcare professionals
- Employers or institutions
- Any individual or entity with relevant information

Complaint Submission

Complaints must be submitted in writing. Submission through the official online complaint form is preferred; however, complaints may also be submitted via email to admin@nabblm.org.

Complaints should include:

- Name and contact information of the complainant (anonymous submissions may be accepted but may limit investigation)
- Name of the candidate or diplomate who is the subject of the complaint
- Description of the concern, including relevant dates and context
- Supporting documentation (if available)

Confidentiality

All complaints and related materials are handled in accordance with NABBLM confidentiality policies.

- Information will be shared only with individuals involved in the review process.
- All proceedings are conducted in a confidential and professional manner.
- Confidentiality may be limited if disclosure is required by law or necessary for investigation.

Professional Conduct Complaint Review Process

1. Initial Review (Administrative Screening)

NABBLM staff/contractors, in consultation with the Credentials and Accreditation Committee, will conduct a preliminary administrative review within 30 days.

The complaint may be dismissed at this stage if:

- It contains insufficient or unreliable information
- It falls outside the scope of NABBLM authority
- It is deemed frivolous or inconsequential

Possible outcomes:

- Dismissal of complaint
- Request for additional information
- Referral to Credentials and Accreditation Committee for review

2. Preliminary Committee Review

If a complaint is deemed valid and actionable:

- The Credentials and Accreditation Committee will refer the matter for further review.
- A Complaint Review Committee will be appointed.

- The Complaint Review Committee will evaluate whether the allegations, if substantiated, would represent a violation of NABBLM standards.

Possible outcomes:

- No action
- Informal educational response
- Advancement to formal investigation

3. Formal Investigation

If an investigation is warranted:

- The candidate/diplomate will be notified in writing.
- A summary of the allegations will be provided.
- The individual will be given 30 days to submit a written response.

The Complaint Review Committee may:

- Review submitted documentation
- Request additional information from involved parties
- Consult with subject matter experts, NABBLM staff/contractor, or legal counsel

All investigations are conducted:

- Objectively
- Without presumption of guilt
- In a confidential manner

Timeline:

Investigations are typically completed within 6 months, unless extenuating circumstances require additional time.

Determination and Actions

Upon completing the investigation, the Complaint Review Committee will make a recommendation to the Credentials and Accreditation Committee. The Credentials and Accreditation Committee may accept, modify, or reject the recommendation.

Sanctions are determined in accordance with the Sanctions Decision Framework.

Possible outcomes (Formal Actions):

- No violation (complaint dismissed)
- Educational letter
- Required remediation or continuing education
- Probation
- Suspension of certification
- Revocation of certification

Potential external reporting includes interaction with:

- State or provincial licensing boards
- Regulatory agencies
- Other relevant organizations

Notice to Complainants

- Complainants will receive acknowledgment of their submission.
- Complainants may be notified of general outcomes.

- Complainants are not parties to the proceeding.
- Complainants are not entitled to detailed findings, remedies, or damages.

Resignation

If a diplomate who is the subject of a complaint voluntarily surrenders their certification at any time during the pendency of a complaint under these Procedures, the complaint is dismissed without any further action by the Complaint Review Committee, the Credentials and Accreditation Committee, or an Appeal Committee established after an appeal. The entire record is sealed, and the individual may not reapply for certification by NABBLM. However, the Credentials and Accreditation Committee may authorize their Committee Chair to communicate the fact and date of resignation, and the fact and general nature of the complaint, which was pending at the time of the resignation, if requested by a government entity engaged in the administration of law.

Determinations & Sanctions Appeal Process

The Appeal Process provides candidates and diplomates with an opportunity to request review of a determination made by the Credentials and Accreditation Committee.

The purpose of the appeal is to ensure that:

- Decisions are based on accurate facts
- NABBLM policies and procedures were followed appropriately
- The process was fair and free from material error

The appeals process is not intended to re-investigate the case or to introduce new evidence, except under limited circumstances defined below.

Eligibility for Appeal

A candidate or diplomate may submit a written request for appeal if:

- A determination has been made that a violation of NABBLM policies or the Code of Professional Conduct occurred
- A sanction has been imposed

Grounds for Appeal

An appeal will be considered only if one or more of the following conditions are met:

- **Material Error of Fact**
The decision was based on incorrect or incomplete information that could have affected the outcome.
- **Procedural Error**
NABBLM failed to follow its published policies or procedures, and this failure may have affected the outcome.
- **New Information (Limited Circumstances)**
New, relevant information has become available that:
 - was not reasonably available at the time of the original review.
 - could materially affect the outcome.

Appeal Submission

- Appeals must be submitted in writing within 30 days of receipt of the determination.
- The request must include both:
 - A clear statement of the grounds for appeal
 - Supporting documentation or explanation
- Late submissions may be considered only at the discretion of NABBLM.

Formation of the Appeal Committee

Upon receipt of a valid appeal, NABBLM will establish an Appeal Committee.

NABBLM may appoint qualified individuals, including NABBLM-C diplomates who are not current Board members, to serve on the Appeal Committee when necessary to ensure adequate expertise and impartiality.

If necessary, due to conflicts of interest or limited availability, NABBLM may appoint alternate members to ensure a complete and impartial Appeal Committee.

The Appeal Committee operates independently from:

- The Complaint Review Committee
- The Credentials and Accreditation Committee

Composition requirements:

- The Appeal Committee will consist of three (3) members, unless otherwise necessary.
- Members must not have participated in the original investigation or determination.
- Members must disclose any actual or potential conflicts of interest.
- Members will be selected to ensure a fair and impartial review to the extent reasonably possible.
- A majority of members should be NABBLM-C diplomates.

Scope of Review

The Appeal Committee will review:

- The record of the original investigation
- The determination made by the Credentials and Accreditation Committee
- The materials submitted in the appeal

The Appeal Committee does not:

- Conduct a new investigation
- Hold formal hearings
- Reassess the case afresh

Appeal Process

The Appeals Process is guided by:

- Fairness and impartiality
- Independence from prior decision-makers
- Respect for due process
- Timely resolution
- Transparency of process

The Appeal Committee will:

- Review all submitted materials
- Evaluate whether:
 - A material error of fact occurred
 - A procedural error occurred
 - New information meets criteria for consideration
- Deliberate independently and objectively
- Consult NABBLM legal counsel as needed.

Timeline

- Appeal submission: within 30 days of decision
- Appeal review and determination: within 90 days of receipt

- Timelines may be extended in cases of complexity or extenuating circumstances.

Appeal Outcomes

The Appeal Committee may:

- Affirm the original determination
- Modify the determination or sanction
- Reverse the determination

Notification of Decision

- The candidate or diplomate will be notified in writing of the appeal outcome.
- The Credentials and Accreditation Committee will be notified of the final decision.

Finality of Process

- The appeal decision represents the final step in the NABBLM complaint and disciplinary process.
- No further internal review is available after the Appeal Committee decision.
- The decision of the Appeal Committee is final and binding.

Record Retention

NABBLM retains records in accordance with organizational needs, applicable legal considerations, and industry standards for certifying and accrediting bodies.

General Retention Guidelines

- **Routine complaints** (no violation or minor issues):
Retained for a minimum of 7 years
- **Complaints resulting in findings, corrective action, or monitoring:**
Retained for 7–10 years, or longer as appropriate
- **Serious sanctions** (e.g., suspension or revocation):
Retained permanently
- **Appeal records:**
Retained permanently or for a minimum of 10 years
- **Retention periods may be extended at NABBLM's discretion based on:**
 - Ongoing relevance to certification or accreditation decisions
 - Legal considerations
 - Patterns of conduct or program performance

General Disposal Guidelines

At the conclusion of the applicable retention period:

- Records will be securely destroyed or permanently de-identified
- Disposal methods will be appropriate to the sensitivity of the information

NABBLM will ensure that record disposal:

- Protects confidentiality
- Prevents unauthorized reconstruction of information

Cross-Border Data Considerations

NABBLM is a U.S.-based organization incorporated in Wisconsin and operates in accordance with applicable U.S. legal and governance frameworks. NABBLM also serves diplomates and training programs located outside the United States, including in Canada.

In this context:

- Information submitted by individuals and programs outside the United States may be transferred to, stored, and processed within the United States.
- NABBLM will handle such information in a manner consistent with generally accepted international privacy principles, including:
 - Data minimization
 - Appropriate use and access controls
 - Secure storage and transmission
 - Retention only as long as necessary for organizational purposes
- NABBLM does not represent itself as a regulatory, governmental, or licensing authority in any jurisdiction.
- NABBLM establishes and enforces standards for its certification and accreditation, which apply to diplomates and accredited programs regardless of geographic location.

Use and Disclosure of Information

Information collected by NABBLM may be used for:

- Certification and accreditation decisions
- Complaint review and disciplinary processes
- Quality improvement and program oversight
- Aggregate reporting (de-identified) to support advancement of the field

Information will not be used for purposes unrelated to NABBLM's mission without appropriate authorization.

NABBLM may disclose limited information in accordance with its policies, including:

- Confirmation of certification or accreditation status
- Public reporting of sanctions, where applicable
- Required disclosures to regulatory or institutional authorities

All disclosures will be limited to what is necessary and appropriate.