

# On Call

A health problem may require that you be admitted to a hospital. Here you will be seen by the physician **on call** (available). At hospitals with teaching programs, the doctor on call usually will be a physician in training called a **resident** (see below). This person will evaluate you for tests, procedures, and consultations that you might require. Occasionally, the person who evaluates you will be a nonphysician professional, usually a **physician assistant** or a **clinical nurse practitioner** (see below). On occasions when you must be admitted to a hospital where your regular doctor does not make hospital **rounds** (a bedside visit to assess your progress with regard to diagnosis, treatment, and recovery), you will be assigned another physician who will act as the **attending physician**, taking ultimate responsibility for your care while you are admitted. During any hospital admission, your care may be shared by several members of a team. The September 10, 2008, issue of *JAMA* is a theme issue devoted to medical education. It includes an article about the workload of medical **interns** (see below) on call as it relates to how many hours they are allowed to work. To help maintain quality of patient care, there are restrictions on the number of hours physicians in training can work.



## GETTING TO KNOW WHO'S ON CALL

- An **intern** is a first-year resident. Interns have completed the required 4 years of medical school.
- A **resident** is a physician training in a specialty training program that may last from 3 to 5 years.
- A **fellow** is a physician in subspecialty training who has completed residency training in a specialty (such as internal medicine) and is training in a subspecialty (such as cardiology or gastroenterology).
- A **physician assistant** is a health care professional who has trained in a certified program to perform certain tasks that would otherwise be performed by a physician. These include taking a medical history and performing a complete physical examination, as well as ordering tests and, in some cases, assisting in surgery. These tasks are done under the supervision of a licensed physician.
- A **clinical nurse practitioner** is a registered nurse who has advanced education and clinical training. Clinical nurse practitioners are trained to evaluate, diagnose, and treat patients. Depending on the state where licensed, some may work independently, while others may be required to work under the supervision of a licensed physician.
- The **attending physician** is your regular physician or one who represents your physician's practice. In some instances, the attending physician may be an employee of the hospital or another physician group. Attending physicians have completed all training in their chosen specialty or subspecialty.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Association of American Medical Colleges  
[www.aamc.org](http://www.aamc.org)
- American Board of Medical Specialties  
[www.abms.org](http://www.abms.org)

## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and other JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on JAMA's Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). Many are available in English, Spanish, and French. A Patient Page on your doctor's education was published in the September 6, 2000, issue, and one on medical specialties was published in the September 5, 2007, issue.

Sources: Association of American Medical Colleges, American Board of Medical Specialties

Carolyn J. Hildreth, MD, Writer

Cassio Lynn, MA, Illustrator

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

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