



# Navigating Your Fellowship Options: NASS ISMM vs. ACGME Pain Fellowships

Choosing the right fellowship is essential for shaping your future practice as a physician. While both NASS (North American Spine Society) and ACGME (Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education) fellowships offer opportunities, NASS ISMM fellowships provide superior training for those seeking to excel in comprehensive spine and musculoskeletal care.

	 <b>NASS ISMM Fellowship</b>	 <b>ACGME Fellowship</b>
<b>Primary Focus</b>	Comprehensive interventional spine and musculoskeletal medicine with PM&R lens. Training also includes ultrasound-guided interventions, electrodiagnostic studies, and regenerative medicine.	Pain management for spine pain, also chronic pain, opiate management, cancer pain, and pediatric pain. Emphasis also on inpatient cases, palliative care, regional blocks, and airway management.
<b>Procedural Training</b>	High procedural volume with emphasis on most common interventions (e.g., TFESI, RFA, SIJ) and also includes advanced procedures (e.g. kyphoplasty, SCS, and Intracept). Focus includes musculoskeletal injections and may also include regenerative medicine (e.g. PRP, BMAC).	Procedural exposure includes typical spine interventions but also less common procedures (e.g. regional blocks, intrathecal pumps) which dilutes procedural volume regarding most utilized spine procedures. Also, inpatient and other "non-pain" rotations reduce total procedure volume.
<b>Physician Identity</b>	Aligns with the core role of a PM&R physician, focusing on non-surgical interventional spine and musculoskeletal medicine to relieve pain and improve function.	Aligns with identity as "pain physician" with a focus on spine and other "non-spine" pain management and no emphasis on musculoskeletal medicine. These programs are largely anesthesiology-based and veer widely from PM&R training.
<b>Program Inclusion</b>	NASS has stringent criteria to recognize programs that meet a high standard of academic and educational rigor. These programs include both academic and private practices.	ACGME programs are typically affiliated with academic programs and do not give the fellow any training in the private practice model.
<b>Career Opportunities</b>	Fellows are well-suited for both private practice and academic settings. NASS graduates are in high demand for comprehensive spine and MSK care.	ACGME is not necessary for academic positions but may be favored in programs focused on chronic pain, opiate management, cancer pain, pediatric pain, and palliative care.
<b>Non-Operative Tools</b>	Emphasis on management of spine and MSK conditions with a full box of Physiatric tools—fluoroscopic and ultrasound-guided procedures, targeted physical therapy and exercise programs, non-opiate medication management, and regenerative medicine.	Focus on managing only spine and other "non-spine" pain conditions and not MSK presentations with limited tools including interventional procedures and chronic medication management, i.e., with opioids.
<b>Hospital/Insurance Credentialing</b>	NASS-trained physicians meet board-certification standards required by the vast majority of hospital systems and all insurance companies.	ACGME accreditation is not a requirement for most hospital systems and is not necessary for insurance credentialing so provides no distinct advantage in these areas.

## NASS ISMM: The Fellowship Designed for Spine and MSK Mastery

When it comes to pursuing a fellowship that provides comprehensive training in spine and musculoskeletal care as a PM&R specialist, NASS ISMM Fellowships offer clear advantages. With an emphasis on comprehensive management including fluoroscopic interventions, ultrasound-guided procedures, electrodiagnostic studies, and regenerative medicine, NASS prepares you for real-world practice, whether in private practice or academia.

To learn more about NASS ISMM fellowships, visit [www.spine.org](http://www.spine.org).