

# National Board of Certification and Recertification for Nurse Anesthetists

## Continuing Competence for Nurse Anesthetists

July 20, 2011

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### Introduction

The National Board on Certification and Recertification of Nurse Anesthetists (NBCRNA) is a not-for-profit corporation organized under the laws of the state of Illinois. NBCRNA is a multidisciplinary body with public representation whose mission is to protect and serve the public by assuring that individuals who are credentialed have met predetermined qualifications or standards for providing nurse anesthesia services at the time of their initial certification and recertification.

Specific to recertification, NBCRNA's purposes are to (1) recertify qualified Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists; (2) formulate, adopt, and continuously evaluate the criteria for recertification of Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists; (3) formulate, adopt, and continuously evaluate the criteria for approval of continuing education activities; (4) develop and administer appellate mechanisms for Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists who have lost or been denied recertification; and (5) develop and administer a mechanism for the investigation and final resolution of charges or other allegations against Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists who are currently recertified.

Consistent with these responsibilities, the NBCRNA undertook an analysis of its recertification program beginning in 2008, with the objective of ensuring that the program has rigor and quality commensurate with the ongoing needs of its constituents. The analysis involved two major projects in 2008—a benchmarking study that summarized key issues and current practice in the renewal of professional licensure and certification and a practice analysis study targeted deliberately at the recertification of nurse anesthetists. The findings of the benchmarking study encourage the definition of continuing competence for the profession as a philosophy through which to evaluate issues and guide the recertification program. The recertification practice analysis provides demographic information about the community of nurse anesthetists and, more significantly, itemizes the changing responsibilities they have as their careers advance.

Investigations continued, culminating with the formation of a Recertification Task Force that was charged with responsibility for making well-reasoned recommendations for a new program of Continued Professional Certification (CPC). This document details the methodology of the Recertification Task Force, as well as NBCRNA's philosophy and plans about the continuing professional certification of nurse anesthetists and key program components.

### **Development of the Plan**

NBCRNA appointed individuals to the Recertification Task Force in the fall of 2010 with the expectation that the group would represent the diversity of the discipline in broad terms. NBCRNA staff and Castle Worldwide identified a number of readings related to recertification and requested that all members of the Recertification Task Force read them carefully. To that end, the Recertification Task Force met by conference call on December 20, 2010, for an orientation to its charge and the readings. Castle

recommended that task force members read the most general documents first (i.e., those addressing concepts and issues pertaining broadly to credentialing), followed by documents focused on recertification for nurses, and then by those specific to anesthesia certifications.

The Recertification Task Force met in Raleigh, North Carolina, January 28 – 30, 2011, for the purpose of discussing key concepts related to recertification, the trends that concern this aspect of credentialing as revealed in the readings, and the recertification practices of other certification bodies, including other anesthesia certifications. The group then reached consensus on a definition of continuing professional competence as it addressed the perspective of the significant stakeholders in the recertification of nurse anesthetists. These foundational definitions provide a philosophy about recertification that guided the design of the proposed CPC program.

**Continuing Professional Competence** is an ongoing, multimodal, and progressive process that maintains and enhances proficiency in nurse anesthesia practice and is a concept that ranges on a continuum from entry-level proficiency to complete mastery. The determination of what knowledge and skill equate to proficiency at the level required for continued professional certification requires judgment about the needs of patients and the range of services that experienced nurse anesthetists provide. The knowledge base and skill set for nurse anesthetists includes (but is not limited to) patient-centered care, work in interprofessional teams, evidence-based practice, quality improvement, and informatics.

**Stakeholders:** The term *stakeholders* refers to the different groups that have an interest in the recertification of nurse anesthetists. Stakeholder groups include the public, patients, their families, anesthesiologists, other physicians, hospitals, other employers, regulatory bodies, continuing education program providers, NBCRNA certificants, and the American Association of Nurse Anesthetists. In general, all stakeholders benefit when the content of the recertification program is targeted at an appropriate level of proficiency.

### **Continued Professional Certification Program**

The goals of the CPC program for nurse anesthetists are (1) to *maintain core competence* and (2) to *enhance competence* beyond the expectations of the initially certified nurse anesthetist. The CPC Program requirements take effect on January 1, 2015. As of that date, the Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist credential is no longer valid for the individual's lifetime. All Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists are required to satisfy CPC program requirements in order to continue holding NBCRNA certification.

Consistent with program goals, four core competencies underpin a nurse anesthetist's ongoing ability to provide safe and effective patient care, and six are planned to enhance professional competence. The core competencies apply to all nurse anesthetists, regardless of the nature of their professional practice. The core competencies address topics and skills that are essential hallmarks of the specialty:

- A nurse anesthetist has advanced knowledge and skill in basic, currently available, and commonly used alternative *airway management techniques*.

Nurse anesthetists are experts in airway management. Accordingly, they possess extensive knowledge and skill in an array of airway management techniques, including those for difficult airways. The CPC program requires in-depth understanding of and learning experiences in

difficult airway algorithms and advanced airway management instrumentation and techniques in order to effect the safe management of patients.

- As practitioners of *applied clinical pharmacology*, nurse anesthetists are knowledgeable about the actions, interactions, and adverse effects of anesthetics and adjuvants.

The term *applied clinical pharmacology* denotes the therapeutic administration of medication. Nurse anesthetists are skilled in evaluating the efficacy of medications in clinical situations. This ability prepares the nurse anesthetist to understand and anticipate normal and abnormal responses to anesthetic agents and adjuvants. The CPC program requires in-depth understanding of applied clinical pharmacology because it is fundamental to the nurse anesthetist's ability to respond to normal and abnormal events.

- Nurse anesthetists are knowledgeable about *human physiology and pathophysiology* and their application to anesthesia practice.

A thorough understanding of the function of and interaction between body systems, such as the cardiovascular, respiratory, and neurological systems, and their associated disorders is essential to the safe and effective administration of anesthesia. The CPC program requires in-depth understanding of physiology and pathophysiology because these sciences are fundamental to the nurse anesthetist's ability to respond to normal and abnormal events.

- *Anesthesia technology* is continually changing and new devices are introduced into practice regularly. Nurse anesthetists have knowledge of the principles of operation and the ability to interpret and respond to data acquired from anesthesia equipment and instrumentation.

Anesthesia equipment and instrumentation include anesthesia machines, vaporizers, monitors, and other devices that are available for anesthesia practice. In-depth knowledge of *anesthesia technology* is fundamental to the nurse anesthetist's ability to assess and respond to perioperative events appropriately. The CPC program focuses on anesthesia technology because it is crucial to providing a safe and effective anesthetic.

Six additional competencies *enhance* a nurse anesthetist's ability to provide patient care:

- A fundamental expectation of the nurse anesthetist is the ability to *access, evaluate for currency and reliability, and apply sources of information* as required on a day-to-day basis.

The individualized patient focus of anesthesia care may present underlying diseases, complications, symptoms, and drug interactions that are not usually encountered in daily practice. It is essential that nurse anesthetists use concise and accurate material to guide the clinical anesthetic management as needed. Sources of information (but are not limited to) include books, online references, and resource materials that are readily available. CPC program activities recognize the importance of this competency because it is crucial to the safe and effective practice of anesthesia.

- Nurse anesthetists have knowledge of *evidence-based practice* and use it to improve the quality of patient care and outcomes.

*Evidence-based practice* is the application of clinical research to practice. The CPC program encourages nurse anesthetists to use the most currently accepted information to enhance anesthesia care.

- Nurse anesthetists have knowledge of and adhere to *current standards of practice*, including ethics, privacy, and cultural diversity.

*Current standards of practice* address the continuum of quality anesthesia care from the initial assessment through the transfer of care. The CPC program recommends learning experiences that address current standards of practice and the treatment of all patients with respect, dignity, and concern for privacy.

- Nurse anesthetists have knowledge of and comply with *current regulatory and facility accreditation requirements*.

Regulatory requirements are established by federal, state, and local agencies, including state licensing boards, in order to protect the public's interest in healthcare quality. Facility accreditation requirements are established by private entities (such as the Joint Commission) in order to promote patient safety, infection control, patient care, and reimbursement. CPC program activities addressing regulation and facility accreditation will prepare nurse anesthetists to work effectively to improve healthcare systems.

- Nurse anesthetists are *leaders in interprofessional teams* working to improve patient outcomes and the quality and safety of anesthesia care within the healthcare system.

*Interprofessional teams* include all disciplines involved in determining the standard of healthcare provided in the institution. Nurse anesthetists exercise leadership skills in cooperation with other providers of care in assuring patient safety and improving outcomes. The CPC program

encourages the nurse anesthetist to become involved in policy formation and implementation, using effective communication skills, in order to advance the quality of care.

- Nurse anesthetists develop *expanding specialized knowledge and skill* pertaining to specific patients, procedures, conditions, and settings gained through personal study and experience.

Nurse anesthetists develop specialized clinical interests. The CPC program encourages the further development of individual expertise in these areas.

### **CPC Program Components**

Having defined essential definitions and goals, the Recertification Task Force had an opportunity to reflect on these foundational aspects of the program and met again March 18 – 20, 2011. After reviewing the definitions and goals, the RTF took a realistic view of current NBCRNA recertification requirements, given the needs of stakeholders. RTF recommendations were then reviewed by NBCRNA, with approval for the following program components.

#### **Licensure**

Current and valid registered nursing and/or advanced nursing practice license issued by the certificant's state board(s) of nursing is required. Certificants will report any change in the status of their license within 30 days to the NBCRNA, and failure to self report constitutes a violation of professional ethics. NBCRNA accepts notification of and investigates licensure actions as reported by any source. Loss of nursing licensure results automatically in the immediate revocation of NBCRNA certification.

#### **Initial Certification by NBCRNA**

Recertification is contingent on having achieved initial certification as a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist by NBCRNA or its predecessor(s).

#### **Length of Certification**

The certification period is four years. Accordingly, the credential expires at the conclusion of the four-year period, and individuals holding it are required to renew it in order to continue using the Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist designation. Compliance with CPC program requirements during the four-year period is monitored annually.

#### **Competency Modules**

As part of the recertification process, NBCRNA requires four core competency modules (developed and administered by NBCRNA) in every recertification cycle, one in each of four core competency areas: *airway management techniques, applied clinical pharmacology, human physiology and pathophysiology, and anesthesia technology*. The modules, which are based on content outlines approved by NBCRNA, are available online and on paper if requested by the certificant.

Each core competency module contains learning objectives for five to six current articles and an open-book assessment of learning. Once initiated, the assessment will remain available for 90 days during which it must be completed successfully. Successful performance on each core competency module is required for recertification. Credit for successful completion of each core competency module will be awarded only once in a recertification period. NBCRNA updates the core competency modules every two years.

## **Continuing Education**

NBCRNA requires 35 Continuing Education Credits per year (140 over four years), as follows:

Per year

- Up to 20 credits per year can be earned in educational activities that do not have an end-of-activity assessment of learning
- Other 15 credits (or more) per year must be earned in educational activities that have end-of-activity assessments of learning.

CE options include but are not limited to the following, subject to approval by the AANA Continuing Education Department:

- AANA workshops
- Academic credit
- Administrative contributions to the profession (e.g., service on professional, state, and national boards and committees)
- Authorship of book chapters and peer reviewed journal articles
- E-Learning
- Facility in-service (practice relevant) program
- Independent study programs on topics related to nurse anesthesia
- Lecture presentations
- Meeting attendance
- Preceptorship of graduate nurse anesthesia students
- Participation in simulation-based education
- Scholarly poster presentations

## **Recertification Examination**

Successful completion of a standardized recertification examination based on a published content outline consistent with the four core competencies of the CPC program is required every eight years. Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists may take the recertification examination at any time during the second four-year recertification cycle. Given the CPC Program implementation date of January 1, 2015, all Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists will be required to satisfy the recertification examination requirement no later than December 31, 2023.

Recertification examination candidates must pass the test before the expiration date of their certification. Those who fail the recertification examination on their first attempt are permitted a total of three additional attempts before their expiration date. Passing the recertification examination on any attempt results in recertification, and failure after the fourth attempt results in the loss of certification at its expiration date.

### **Professional Work Practice Requirements**

**Definition:** The practice of nurse anesthesia may include clinical practice, nurse anesthesia-related administrative, educational or research activities, or a combination of any of the above areas of practice. To be nurse anesthesia-related, activities must be directly related to the delivery or improvement of anesthesia care to patients. It is the responsibility of the applicant to verify with NBCRNA if experience that is not covered under this definition qualifies for recertification.

**Requirement:** Because NBCRNA certification is a credential to practice, accurate documentation is required to verify that the applicant has at least 425 hours per year in nurse anesthesia work practice. For individuals who do not document compliance with the professional work practice requirement for any one continuous twelve month period during the four-year recertification cycle, NBCRNA will require completion of up to 20 additional hours of continuing education with end-of-activity assessments. Individuals who do not satisfy the above requirement are not eligible for recertification (see Criteria for Re-entry to Certification below). The decision as to whether an applicant has satisfied the above requirement is at the discretion of the NBCRNA.

### **Noncompliance**

Certificants are responsible for satisfying all CPC program requirements. In order to facilitate compliance, NBCRNA will report CPC program activity to all participants annually. However, the fact that a certificant did not receive CPC program activity report(s), or any notice(s), information, form(s) or other materials from the NBCRNA, will not relieve the anesthetist of any obligation to meet CPC program requirements, and will not serve as the basis for an appeal or reconsideration of any resulting adverse decision or action.

Failure to meet each and every CPC program requirement will result in the expiration of certification on the specified date and NBCRNA notice to the pertinent state board(s) of nursing. Individuals whose certification expires will have to apply for new certification as detailed below.

### **Criteria for Re-entry to Certification**

NBCRNA certification expires on the date specified for each certificant and must be renewed through the CPC program. When individuals whose certification is no longer valid (for any reason other than revocation) wish to renew their NBCRNA credential within 90 days of expiration they must reapply for certification and:

1. satisfy the eligibility criteria for recertification at the time of their reapplication.
2. pass the Recertification Examination consistent with examination policies in force at the time of reapplication.

If more than 90 days have transpired, these individuals will be required to satisfy the eligibility criteria for recertification at the time of their reapplication as well as apply for and pass the entry-level National Certification Examination.

**Failure to Pass the Recertification Examination**

If the loss of NBCRNA certification is the result of repeated failure of the recertification examination, individuals may apply for initial certification. The individual must satisfy all eligibility criteria set forth by NBCRNA for initial certification at the time of this application and they must pass the entry-level National Certification Examination.

**Change of Name or address**

**Each nurse anesthetist has the individual and sole responsibility to provide the NBCRNA with timely notification of any change of name and/or address.** If an anesthetist does not receive any notice(s), information, form(s) or other materials from the NBCRNA as a result of the anesthetist's failure to give timely notification to the NBCRNA of a change of name or address, that lack of notification shall not relieve the anesthetist of any obligation required by the NBCRNA. Further, lack of receipt of material from the NBCRNA shall not serve as the basis for an appeal or reconsideration of any resulting adverse decision or action.

**Disciplinary Matters**

Disciplinary matters that may implicate a nurse anesthetist's ability to maintain Continued Professional Certification are subject to the NBCRNA *Policy and Procedures for Disciplinary Review*.

**Appeals**

Adverse decisions of the NBCRNA are subject to review or appeal pursuant to the NBCRNA *Review and Appeal Process for Adverse Decisions*.

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