

Associate Editors: *Jean Shinnors, PhD, RN-BC*

Jennifer Graebe, MSN, RN, NEA-BC

Author: *Sean DeGarmo, PhD, RN, ACNS-BC, FNP-BC, ENP-BC*

Using ANCC Certification Renewal Criteria as a Roadmap for Career Development and Lifelong Learning

abstract

Nursing continuing professional development (NCPD) requires strategic planning and a lifelong commitment. Advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) not only engage in specific NCPD to meet regulatory and certification requirements, but also to expand their professional practice in other areas such as leadership and education. Collaboration between APRNs and nursing professional development (NPD) practitioners provides an opportunity for NCPD to be tailored to the specific needs of APRN students and practicing APRNs. [*J Contin Educ Nurs*. 2020;51(10):444-446.]

Nursing professional development (NPD) practitioners have a unique opportunity to guide students enrolled in advanced practice registered nursing (APRN) programs and those currently board certified as APRNs in exploring requirements to obtain and maintain certification that includes nursing continuing professional development (NCPD). Some requirements are unique to the individual certifying

body such as the number of practice hours needed to maintain certification. Others require careful consideration of the strategies that can be used to maintain certification requirements. As an APRN student approaches graduation, or a practicing APRN considers the type of NCPD to engage in, the NPD practitioner can serve as a mentor and facilitator in mapping out an NCPD plan that serves to meet renewal requirements but also provides an opportunity for the APRN student or practitioner to improve their practice.

The renewal process for APRNs certified by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) is composed of two components (ANCC, 2017). The first component of ANCC certification renewal is participation in NCPD, often referred to as continuing education (CE). APRNs are required to obtain a minimum of 75 CE hours every 5 years, and 51% of those hours must be in their specialty practice area. In addition, all APRNs must complete 25 CE hours of pharmacotherapy as part of the required 75 CE hours. NPD practitioners can inform APRNs of these requirements as they focus on content and quality. The educational offering should

be designed and implemented using the best available evidence and be free of commercial influence. Further, research posits that NCPD provided by an ANCC-accredited organization is outcomes driven and free from bias and influence (Novakovich, 2017). NCPD positively influences practice by providing new knowledge and skills that the APRN may use to educate or mentor others (Bryant & Posey, 2019).

The second component of certification renewal for ANCC board-certified APRNs is a flexible menu of options that each APRN can select from to meet the requirements (Table 1). There are eight different categories that can be tailored to fit the individual needs of each APRN. NPD practitioners can use these categories to guide practicing APRNs and APRN students to develop an NCPD plan that meets their learning needs. Professional development has been noted to foster positive practice environments, improve professional satisfaction, and maintain competence that translates to better patient care (Price & Reichert, 2017). The research posits that nurses who invest in continuing professional development have demonstrated growth in their practice and provided quality patient care (Price & Reichert, 2017). NPD practitioners are well positioned to empower APRN students and practicing APRNs to engage in NCPD and lifelong learning (Price & Reichert, 2017). To demonstrate

Dr. DeGarmo is Director, APRN Initiatives, American Nurses Credentialing Center, Silver Spring, Maryland.

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Address correspondence to Sean DeGarmo, PhD, RN, ACNS-BC, FNP-BC, ENP-BC, Director, APRN Initiatives, American Nurses Credentialing Center, 8515 Georgia Avenue, Suite 400, Silver Spring, MD 20910-2910; email: Sean.DeGarmo@ana.org.

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how the NPD practitioner may apply this flexible menu of renewal requirements, six scenarios are presented below. These scenarios reflect APRNs at different stages in their professional careers.

SCENARIO 1

Wanda (all names are pseudonyms) graduated from her family nurse practitioner program 2 years ago. She has been happy and engaged in learning her new role in a primary care office, but recently has increased her interest in further specializing in the field of cardiology. She wants to build her knowledge and skills in this area. She is seeking your guidance as the office's NPD practitioner in how to further develop these skills. What is your response?

Encourage Wanda to attend an accredited cardiology conference to focus on expanding her knowledge and skills. Review sessions of interest and plan attendance based on her goal of further developing cardiology knowledge and skills. If Wanda is awarded contact hours for successfully completing the conference requirements, she may choose to apply the CE to Category 1 for ANCC certification renewal.

SCENARIO 2

Juan has excelled as an adult-gerontology acute care nurse practitioner in the adult intensive care unit. He enjoys managing critically ill patients as a member of an interprofessional collaborative care team. He sees himself progressing in a leadership role and is seeking your advice as the NPD practitioner. He wants to know if he can count the academic credit (Category 2) he earns in a Masters Business Administration program toward his certification renewal requirements. What is your response?

As an NPD practitioner, it is important to remind Jason that the academic credit must be in his area

Category	Minimum Requirements ^a
1. Continuing education (CE) hours	75 CE hours ^a
2. Academic credits	5 semester credits (or 6 quarter credits) ^a
3. Presentations	One or more presentations (totaling 5 clock hours) ^a
4. Evidence-based practice (EBP), quality improvement (QI) project, publication or research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EBP/QI Project: one project that uses problem-solving approach • Publication: One article in peer-reviewed journal or book chapter; five different articles in nonpeer-reviewed journal • Research: An institutional review board research project^a; dissertation, thesis, or doctoral project; content expert reviewer^a
5. Preceptor hours	120 hours of direct clinical supervision ^a
6. Professional service	2 or more years of volunteer service during certification period.
7. Practice hours	1,000 practice hours (minimum) ^a
8. Assessment by examination	Pass the assessment examination (portfolios have been retired and are no longer an option)

Note. AACN = American Nurses Credentialing Center; APRN = advanced practice registered nurses.
^a Must be in certification specialty.

of ANCC certification. However, the NPD practitioner may consider exploring with Jason an interest in preparing for a board certification in health care management and/or nursing leadership.

SCENARIO 3

Laticia is an adult-gerontology acute care nurse practitioner who works on the heart failure unit. She is interested in obtaining her Doctor of Nurse Practice degree but is not sure what her focus will be. What is your response as the NPD practitioner?

You can help Laticia identify areas of interest in her clinical specialty. After narrowing down on evidence-based practice (EBP) as an area of interest, the NPD practitioner can work with Laticia to develop an EBP project or intervention (Category 4). Laticia can then disseminate her EBP project and NCPD opportunity by presenting to other nurses and mem-

bers of the interprofessional team. This would meet the requirements for Category 3. Taking her NCPD opportunities further, the NPD practitioner can guide Laticia to by working with her to publish or present her work. This would meet the requirements for Category 4.

SCENARIO 4

Carla is an adult-gerontological primary care nurse practitioner who wants to practice clinically and has an interest in being a clinical faculty member. What is your response as the NPD practitioner?

You could recommend Carla to become an APRN preceptor. This would meet the ANCC requirement for Category 5 (120 hours of teaching or instruction). With the increase in students enrolling in APRN programs, qualified preceptors are extremely sought after (Doherty et al., 2020). NPD practi-

tioners can ensure that the preceptorship program follows evidence-based criteria for the selection of a preceptor but that it also nurtures and supports preceptors (Nash & Flowers, 2017).

SCENARIO 5

Stephanie is a director of APRNs and aspires to become a chief nursing officer. With the increase in Stephanie's administrative duties, she is not able to provide direct care to patients as an APRN. Stephanie was planning to renew her certification using her practice hours but is concerned that she may not have enough hours. What advice do you give to Stephanie?

In contrast to other certifying bodies, the ANCC practice hours (Category 7) serve as an option but are not required for renewal. Stephanie can maintain her certification if she meets the requirements in other categories. By examining the other categorical options, as the NPD practitioner you can encourage Stephanie to use her role as a member of the nursing school board to fulfill her professional service which meets Category 6.

SCENARIO 6

David is a family nurse practitioner on a leave of absence after needing to take care of a family member

with a terminal illness. David completed his 75 CE hours but is unable to fulfill the other renewal categories before his renewal period expires. As an NPD practitioner, how would you advise David?

There are times when it may be necessary for the APRN to renew by taking an assessment examination (Category 8). It is important for you as the NPD practitioner to remind the APRN that renewal by examination may not be available, as some certification examinations and all the certification by portfolio have been retired. Once an examination is retired, renewal by certification is no longer an option for the APRN. The NPD practitioner can mitigate the likelihood of this scenario by periodically reviewing the NCPD plan with the APRN.

CONCLUSION

Certification renewal should not be a time of panic but rather a time of accomplishment and reflection on engagement in NCPD. Several categorical options can be used to maintain and renew the ANCC advanced practice certification. With guidance from the NPD practitioner, the renewal process can be leveraged as a roadmap for career development and engagement in lifelong learning.

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