Getting Ready for the NP Certification Exam

Getting Ready for Certification
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Neighborhood Health Plan, Boston, MA

Objectives
● Having completed the learning activities, the participant will be able to:  
– Describe the purpose of NP certification.  
– Recognize the content of the NP certification examinations.  
– Identify factors in a successful NP certification study plan.

Thank you!
Fitzgerald Health Education Associates, Inc.  
We have helped more than 85,000 NPs achieve certification.
In the First 15 Years of the NP Role’s Establishment

• The scope of practice expanded, matched with the increasing complexity of healthcare

(continued)

• Need to define and credential the profession

• Part of this credentialing included the establishment of the NP certification examination.
NP Certification

• Certification part of APRN licensure in nearly all of the US states

• Exceptions
  – Kansas
  – New York
  – California

– To read more Dr. Fitzgerald’s Q&A

Agencies Offering NP Certification

• American Academy of Nurse Practitioners
  – www.aanpcertification.org
    • FNP, adult-gero, ANP certification

• American Nurses Credentialing Center
  – www.nursecredentialing.org
    • FNP, adult-gero primary care, ANP, GNP, PMHNP, PNP, ACNP, adult-gero acute care NP certification

Agencies Offering NP Certification (continued)

• AACN Certification Corporation
  – www.aacn.org
    • Adult-Gero Acute Care NP

• National Certification Corporation
  – www.nccwebsite.org
    • WHNP, neonatal NP
**Agencies Offering NP Certification**

(continued)

- Pediatric Nursing Certification Board
  - www.pncb.org
  - Primary care PNP, acute care PNP

**How do the certifying organizations describe certification and the NP certification examination?**

- Per the ANCC
  - “Certification is the process by which a nongovernmental agency or an association grants recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications.”

**How do the certifying organizations describe certification and the NP certification examination?** (continued)

- “Certification can be used for entry into practice, validation of competence, recognition of excellence, and/or for regulation. It can be *mandatory or voluntary*.”
How do the certifying organizations describe certification and the NP certification examination? (continued)

• “Certification validates an individual’s knowledge, skills, and abilities in a defined role and clinical area of practice, based on pre-determined standards.”
  – Source: www.nursecredentialing.org/certification.aspx

How do the certifying organizations describe certification and the NP certification examination? (continued)

• “The Nurse Practitioner (NP) certification examination tests the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for entry into advanced practice.”
  – Source: www.nursecredentialing.org/certification.aspx

How do the certifying organizations describe certification and the NP certification examination? (continued)

• According to the NCSBN, the NP certification programs provide a legally defensible examination suitable for the regulation of advanced practice nurses.
What should you expect on the NP boards?

*These are examinations to determine if a qualified person possesses the knowledge base to be a safe, entry-level NP and to able to apply that knowledge base in clinical scenarios presented during the examination.*

Question Style

- Most often, four option test items
  - A stem (question itself) and four possible choices or options
    - Exception: NCC for WHNP = 3 options
  - No penalty for incorrect items
    - An incorrect answer is point or value neutral.

Question Style (continued)

- Other styles
  - Chose all that are correct, more than 1 answer correct.
  - Correctly identify an image, ECG tracing, others
Test Availability

- Computer-based
  - Year-round
- Multiple test sites across the country

Availability of Results

- For computer-based exams
  - Results provided, pass or fail, at end of the examination

Comparison of Exams

- Recognition for NP licensure
  - All aforementioned exams
- Credential
  - AANP example- NP-C, can add letter to designate area of certification, such as FNP-C, AGNP-C, ANP-C
  - PNCB example- CPNP-PC, CPNP-AC
  - NCC example- WHNP-BC
What is common to all NP examinations?

• No matter what patient population
  – Family (entire lifespan), adult (age =>13 y), gerontology, adult-gero, women’s health, pediatric (up to age 22 years)

• Practice setting
  – Primary care (ANP, FNP, AGNP, PNP, WHNP), acute care (ACNP, AGACNP)

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Anatomy, physiology, pathophysiology, pharmacology
  – Mechanism of disease, how drug therapies modify disease

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Health promotion and disease prevention
  – Principles of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention
What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

- Obtaining the health history
  – Interview techniques, analyzing content of subjective information

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

- Evaluation of signs and symptoms
  – Symptom analysis, developing working diagnosis

- Physical examination
  – Knowledge of normal, abnormal finding, synthesizing findings with health history to hone diagnosis

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

- Laboratory, diagnostic testing
  – Ordering or performing tests to help support diagnosis and/or contribute to the treatment plan
What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Evidence-based practice (EPB)
  – Developing the plan of care based on supporting scientific evidence and clinical guidelines

• All Fitzgerald Health review courses are based on the latest in evidence-based practice and exam blueprints.

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Legal and ethical issues*
  – Malpractice, confidentiality (HIPAA), patient advocacy and competency

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• For more information on malpractice, see Avoiding Malpractice in the FHEA newsletter: http://fhea.epubxp.com/i/180801/0
What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Cultural competence
  – Incorporating commonly encountered cultural beliefs and practices

• Principles of epidemiology
  – Considering sensitivity, specificity of diagnostics, prevalence, incidence, others

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Healthcare economics
  – Providing cost-effective care, Medicare, Medicaid, private insurances, nation healthcare financing issues

• Healthcare management
  – APRN as a healthcare leader

In the NP certification examination, you will answer approximately 140 clinically-oriented questions that count towards your final score. Given the breadth and depth of NP practice, expect no more than 1-3 questions on a given topic.
What are the differences in the NP certification examinations?

- ANCC exams
  - When compared to other agencies, generally higher percent focused on professional issues, healthcare policy, etc.
  - Example- ~25% of family, adult-gerontology exams
  - Check with ANCC website for specifics.

- Other certifying bodies
  - Section on professional issues either not found as a special section (AANP) or small amount (WHNP=2%)

Passing Score on NP Boards: Examples for Current Exams

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ANCC</th>
<th>AANP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>&gt;=350/500</td>
<td>&gt;=500/800</td>
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Typical Percentage of Examinees Who Pass the Examination

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<tr>
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<th>ANCC</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Typically, ~85% Translates to a score of 350 (minimum passing score)</td>
<td>Typically, ~85% Translates to score of 500 (minimum passing score)</td>
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Procedure if Failure: Examples

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<th>ANCC</th>
<th>AANP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apply to retest after 60 days</td>
<td>Apply to retest, 15 h CE prior to retesting, no more than two times</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>in a calendar year</td>
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Recertification Every 5 Years

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<th>ANCC</th>
<th>AANP</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practice hours plus CE hours including pharm CE</td>
<td>Practice hours plus CE hours including pharm CE, updating as of 2017</td>
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<td>and select professional activities</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aanpcert.org/ptistore/control/recert/index">http://www.aanpcert.org/ptistore/control/recert/index</a> for details</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="http://www.nursecredentialing.org/RenewalRequirements.aspx">http://www.nursecredentialing.org/RenewalRequirements.aspx</a></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recertification (continued)

ANCC or AANP
Taking the NP boards again is a seldom used but viable options for recertifying.

Focus Your Study
• The material from your certifying body that is sent via mail or available on the agency’s website
  – Outlines exam content in detail
  – At the same time, you will not be tested on every topic area listed.
• Be well-prepared to exercise the full scope of NP skills.

Keep in Mind Your Practice Setting
• Primary care NPs
  • FNP, AGNP, ANP, WHNP, PNP-PC
  – Outpatient setting physically distanced from the hospital
• Acute care NPs
  • AGACNP, ACNP
  – In/outpatient, ED, urgent care

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Information on exam...

- At least 6 months old!
- "Hot off the press" issues not likely included

The NP certification exams test the following:

- Why a patient is at risk for a problem.
- How a clinical problem has developed.
- What is the most likely clinical presentation of the condition?

(continued)

- Why a given intervention is effective.
- How that intervention works.
- What is the most likely clinical outcome?
- Why this clinical problem is of significance to the overall healthcare system.
Types of Test Questions: Which Type on the NP Boards?

- Lower-level Thinking
  - Designed to assess memory
  - Focus on recognition
  - Emphasis on specific details

- Higher-level Thinking
  - Designed to assess problem-solving
  - Focus on application in new situations
  - Emphasis on critical reasoning


Types of Tests: What will you find in the NP Boards?

- Teacher-Generated
  - Designed for a single course
  - Limited focus
  - Emphasis on specific details

- Standardized Test
  - Designed to cover entire domain
  - Global focus
  - Emphasis on associations


Therefore, a poor approach to preparing for exam and practice is...

- ...to memorize information so you know what to do but not why you are doing it, in both the exam room and as part of the larger healthcare system.
A better approach to preparing for the exam and practice is...

• ...to understand concepts and apply knowledge so you know what to do and why you are doing it.

Study with intent and purpose.
Increase and secure your knowledge base prior to answering practice questions.

Developing a Study Plan for the NP Certification Examination

Additional Resources

• Frequently asked questions, study recommendations and sample exam questions to aid in preparing for certification including archives of Margaret Fitzgerald’s certification issues articles

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Additional Resources (continued)

- Archived FHEA electronic newsletters at fhea.com
  - Timely information on pharmacology
  - Clinical issues of interest to advanced practice nurses
  - Archived PDFs available free of charge at http://fhea.epubxp.com/i/490489-march-2015

Additional Resources (continued)

- Answers to Your Most Common Test Taking Questions


Questions?
End of Presentation
Thank you for your time and attention.
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All websites listed active at the time of publication.