

Consideration of Request for Charge To The Advisory Committee on Education

Summary of Request:

Consider Staff's request to approve and issue a charge to the Advisory Committee on Education (ACE) to study possible rule changes related to the time allowed for nursing graduates to take the NCLEX® examination after completion of the nursing program.

Historical Perspective:

- The current rule [Rule 217.2(c)] allowing a nursing graduate four (4) years to take the NCLEX® examination following completion of the program has been in effect since 2003. Prior to that time, candidates for the NCLEX® examination were limited in the number of times allowed to take the examination during the four (4) year period.
- The four (4) year time span has been questioned by nursing education programs because of a potential negative impact on the programs' NCLEX® examination pass rates. It has also been questioned because of the potential threat to patient safety due to the gap in clinical practice time and in the loss of clinical skills.
- Board Staff have carried out a detailed review and close analysis of NCLEX® summary reports for two different examination years. Findings have indicated that the number of first-time candidates during the third and fourth year following graduation was insignificant and would have had no impact on whether a program's pass rate was below 80% for the examination year. (A study of the NCLEX® 2011 data for professional programs revealed that first time applicants who tested in the third and fourth year was 0.003% of the total number of first time candidates for that examination year. The NCLEX® data for 2014 was examined for both professional and vocational programs and findings indicated that the percentages of first time candidates testing in the third and fourth year were 0.003% for VN students and 0.0009% for RN students.)
- Even though there were 252 RN students and 277 VN students who tested in the third and fourth years following graduation, the majority were repeaters (candidates who have taken the NCLEX® examination one or more times before.)
- The question remains about the wisdom of allowing graduates to test for up to four (4) years following graduation since it may affect patient safety.

Other Considerations:

Length of Time to Take the NCLEX® Examination in Other States:

- Board Staff gathered data from the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) Member Board Profiles about processes for examination for licensure in other states. Of the 48 member boards who responded:
 - 28 (58%) allow unlimited time for graduates to take the NCLEX® examination;
 - 14 (28%) allow three (3) to five (5) years to take the examination;
 - 4 (8%) allow two (2) years; and
 - 2 (2%) allow one (1) year.

Required Remediation After Failed Attempts:

- Texas Rule 217.2(d) states that “An applicant who has not passed the NCLEX-PN or NCLEX-RN within four years from the date of completion of requirements for graduation must complete a board approved nursing education program in order to take or retake the examination.”
- At the present time, candidates who have not passed the NCLEX® examination during the four (4)-year period after graduation are required to “re-educate” in a board approved program. In other words, they must complete anew the program requirements defined by the program to gain a new Affidavit of Graduation from the program director. For the sake of the NCLEX® examination, they are considered first-time candidates following completion and become a part of the program’s pass rate for the examination year in which they take the examination.
- Consideration for a change in this rule would be necessary if a rule change in the length of time to take the NCLEX® examination occurred.

Restrictions on the Number of Attempts to Take the NCLEX:

- The majority of member boards reporting data to NCSBN do not have a limit for the number of attempts to take the NCLEX® examination.

Feedback from Constituents:

Board Staff solicited feedback from the following constituents:

- The Texas Association of Vocational Nurse Educators had requested consideration for shortening the time allowed for graduates to test during the open forum at the October 2014 Board meeting.
- Board Staff surveyed Associate Degree and Baccalaureate Degree nursing programs to determine their feedback. Of the seventy-three (73) responses, the majority favored a one (1) to two (2) year limit for the time allowed for testing.
- Other groups that also supported reducing the time were:
 - Texas League for Nursing
 - Texas Nurses Association
 - Licensed Vocational Nurses Association of Texas
 - Texas Organization of Nurse Executives

Evidence of the Impact of Reducing the Time for Graduates to Take the NCLEX® Examination:

- In order to evaluate a feasible period for students to test and to determine the impact on the agency and on future students, Board Staff reviewed all Texas candidates for the 2014 NCLEX® examination year.
- The review of data from the analysis indicated that:
 - The majority of successful candidates take the NCLEX® examination within the first six months following graduation. Many other successful candidates take the examination within a year following graduation.
 - Only 529 candidates from both VN and RN programs (0.025%) of the total 21,122 candidates took the examination between two (2) years and four (4) years after graduation. Only twenty-three (23) of the 529 candidates were taking the examination for the first time; the other 506 candidates were repeaters.
 - About 28% of the repeaters were graduates from programs that have recently closed or have had Board sanctions.

Pros and Cons from the Analysis:

Pros:

- Reducing the time allowed for nursing graduates to take the NCLEX® following graduation could protect the public from the perspective that the graduates who wait to test have been away from the clinical setting and their knowledge base and clinical skills are not as current as they were earlier.
- If the rule reduced the time allowed for testing, students may be more likely to take the NCLEX® within a shorter time following graduation, thus increasing their chance for success (Eich & O'Neill, 2007). Repeaters may be more likely to remediate and reschedule to take the NCLEX® examination more quickly.
- Constituents have voiced their support for reducing the time frame for nursing graduates to take the NCLEX® examination.

Cons:

- There is no statistical evidence that shortening the time frame for nursing graduates to take the NCLEX® will make any difference in NCLEX® examination pass rates nor in patient safety.
- Regardless of Texas rules, graduates who have not passed the NCLEX® examination within four (4) years may take the examination in another state that has no time limits, and then endorse into Texas.
- There will be an impact on processing examination and endorsement applications by agency staff.
- Opportunities for students to be admitted to a board approved program for re-education need to be available which may present an added responsibility for nursing education programs.
- There are a number of nursing graduates who have not passed the NCLEX® examination and plan to schedule a repeat examination. A shorter time frame will affect their plans.

Rationale for Staff Recommendation:

Board Staff recognize that this issue has far-reaching implications and want to involve the ACE Committee in the discussion and recommendation.

Staff Recommendation:

Move to issue a charge to ACE to study the issue of reducing the time frame for nursing graduates to take the NCLEX® examination following graduation to determine if rule changes are warranted.

References

Eich, M., & O'Neill, T. (2007). NCLEX® delay pass rate study. *NCLEX® psychometric research brief*, January 2007, 1-5.