



# Registered Nurses Association of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut

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## RNANT/NU Frequently Asked Questions RN Entry to Practice Regulatory Exam

### **Introduction:**

In December 2011, the Registered Nurse Association of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut (RNANT/NU) along with nine other regulatory bodies in Canada agreed to enter into negotiations for the introduction of a new state-of-the-art, computer-adaptive entry exam for future RN candidates (beginning 2015).

After issuing a Request for Proposals to vendors world-wide and conducting a rigorous review of proposals submitted, the 10 nursing regulators selected the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) to partner in the development of this exam.

RNANT/NU has developed a Q&A document to help members understand why and how this decision was made and to address any concerns you may have.

Please feel free to contact RNANT/NU with any feedback at [ed@nantnu.ca](mailto:ed@nantnu.ca).

### **Q: Do regulatory bodies have the authority to change the RN entry exam?**

**A:** Yes. As nursing is a self-regulated profession, approving the educational requirements to enter the nursing profession, as well as determining the competence of those applying for a licence to practise, is the exclusive role of the RN regulatory bodies (within their respective provinces/territories).

Within their regulatory mandates to protect the public, it is the responsibility of regulatory bodies to decide what exam will be used to assess candidates' readiness (competence) to practise. It is also a legislated requirement within each province/territory that RN candidates successfully complete the exam approved by their respective regulatory body. The entry to practise exam is based upon the Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics and Entry Level Competencies which are all documents approved by RNANT/NU.

It is important to distinguish the differences between a high stakes licensure examination versus an examination developed for educational purposes. Licensure examinations primarily focus on protection of the public, while education examinations focus primarily on individual student progression.

Because educational examinations measure educational achievement or progression, content decisions generally reflect a distinct set of curricular objectives, while licensure examination content decisions generally reflect a much broader set of knowledge, skills and abilities necessary for competent practise as defined by an entry-level practice analysis.

### **Q. Who approves the RN entry exam for nurses entering practise in the Northwest Territories and Nunavut?**



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**A.** The legislation in the NT and NU is very clear about the approval process for the RN registration exam. It is the responsibility of the RNANT/NU's Board of Directors to approve the exam for NT/NU RN registration.

**Q: Why is the exam changing after being considered appropriate for so long?**

**A:** The current exam, the CRNE, is still a valid and reliable assessment of entry-level competencies; however, the format of the exam (i.e., pen and paper) is outdated. The decision to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP), for the development of a computer-adaptive exam, was based on the regulators' goal to provide future RN candidates (from 2015 onward) with an exam that would be more affordable, flexible and accessible.

**Q: How will the new exam be an improvement over the current one?**

**A:** A key feature of the new examination is that it is computer-adaptive. This form of computer-based testing provides a state-of-the-art assessment of a candidate's readiness for practise. The following are some of the advantages of computer-adaptive examinations:

- allows applicants to register to write the examination as soon as the regulatory body declares they are "examination eligible"
- enhances timely access to the profession, with examination services being accessible throughout the year in larger sites and at a specific time period for smaller sites like the NT/NU and most of Atlantic Canada.
- expedites registration to full active practising Registered Nurse because the regulatory body receives exam results within 48 hours
- offers a variety of item formats (e.g., multiple choice, graphics, audio) and easily adapts to address changes in entry-to-practise competencies
- differentiates borderline candidates, which is an important public safety consideration for regulatory bodies
- minimizes the exposure of items in the examination item bank, thereby enhancing the regulator's ability to offer a fair, legally defensible entry exam.

**Q. What is the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN)?**

**A.** NCSBN is a **not-for-profit** organization whose purpose is to provide boards of nursing with a forum to act and counsel together on matters of common interest and concern affecting the public health, safety and welfare, including the development of licensing examinations in nursing. Members include U.S. boards of nursing and associate members including five Canadian RN regulators.

**Q: Why was the NCSBN selected over a Canadian vendor?**

**A:** The RFP was open to vendors world-wide, and while the regulators would have been pleased to have had a Canadian vendor awarded the contract, the ultimate goal was to secure the best possible exam for future RN candidates. The NCSBN has a proven track record in



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providing state-of-the-art computer-adaptive exams and demonstrated the best ability to meet the criteria set out by the regulators.

A significant factor in the decision to partner with NCSBN was their world-class level of test security and data protection. Advanced security features employed for the new exam will include controlled testing environments (e.g., digital video surveillance and recordings) and global identity management to make sure only authorized/verified individuals are able to take the exam (e.g., digital capture of signatures and photographs, use of advanced palm vein biometrics).

## **Q. What was the selection process?**

**A.** An RFP for the “Development and Delivery of a Computer Adaptive Exam for Entry to the Registered Nurse Profession” was issued by the College of Nurses of Ontario in September 2011 on behalf of the 10 RN regulators. Proposals were accepted by Oct. 21, 2011. The RN regulators conducted a face-to-face interview process with companies that submitted a proposal.

The RN regulators, with the assistance of psychometrician Dr. Bruno Zumbo from the University of British Columbia, met by teleconference November 4 to consider the proposals submitted.

Based on the outcome of the RFP process, the 10 RN regulators recommended they enter into negotiations with the National Council of State Boards of Nursing.

## **Q. What were the evaluation criteria for selection?**

**A.** The NCSBN proposal best met the evaluation criteria in terms of:

- meeting public interest goals: legally defensible, credible and accessible
- testing entry-level competencies of Canadian nursing practice
- ensuring the examination would reflect Canadian context
- stakeholder input in key activities that contribute to exam integrity
- ensuring examination is available in both English and French
- affordability to candidates based on a solid business model
- accessible, secure, and adaptable testing centres
- frequent and timely statistical analysis and reporting
- a shared goal of excellence in nursing regulation
- the ability to adapt to the regulator’s needs as they continue to evolve
- experience communicating and working with regulatory bodies, transitioning to automated examinations, and delivering excellence in testing services
- compliance with Canada’s *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA)* and any applicable provincial/territorial Privacy Acts



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- a proven state of the art product
- a partner in a global vision recognizing the increased labour mobility of nursing

**Q: Given the differences between the Canadian and American healthcare systems, how can the NCLEX exam be considered appropriate for candidates applying for a nursing licence in Canada?**

**A:** Comparative studies (with samples of employers, educators and practising nurses) strongly suggest that: 1) entry-level RNs view practice similarly across Canada and the United States, and, 2) there is a well-defined pattern of similarity in entry-level nursing competencies in each of these countries.

The 10 Canadian RN regulators and NCSBN are committed to conducting ongoing research to further explore and document the characteristics of nursing practise across Canada and the U.S.

Because of the strong correlation between the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to perform competently at an entry-level in the nursing profession in Canada and the U.S., the Canadian RN regulators are confident the NCLEX will serve as a valid and reliable tool to measure the competencies entry-level registered nurses must have to practise safely, ethically and competently in Canada.

It is important to recognize by the time nursing students graduate from approved nursing education programs, they have already demonstrated their potential to practise safely, competently and ethically – and to meet the competencies established by regulatory bodies for entry-level registered nurses. The entry exam is the official ‘standard’ by which to measure candidates’ competencies for the purpose of licensure.

**Q. How will the regulators ensure the 2015 exam reflects Canadian nursing content and context of practice?**

**A.** Ensuring RN candidates meet entry competencies and are qualified to provide safe and ethical care in Canada is paramount to the RN regulators. Before launching the new RN entry exam, the regulatory bodies will ensure that:

- the exam assesses entry-level practice competencies for Canadian nursing practice (by conducting a thorough review of RN practice and entry-level competencies in Canada)
- Canadian nurses have the opportunity to participate in all aspects of exam development
- Canadian nurses will form expert panels to conduct both cultural sensitivity and translation reviews of the exam
- nurse educators and students have the opportunity to learn about the new exam well in advance of its introduction.



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## **Q. How does the exam recognize and accommodate English as a second language (ESL) or learning disabilities?**

**A.** The reading level of examinations are monitored and maintained at a minimum level so the exam measures nursing ability and not reading ability. Candidates with diagnosed learning disabilities that have previously been identified and compensated for can request testing accommodation for the writing of the exam (current practice).

## **Q. How will RNANT/NU ensure compliance with Canadian privacy legislation?**

**A.** The contract to be developed with NCSBN will be compliant with Canadian privacy legislation. NCSBN has conducted a thorough review of Canadian data privacy protection legislation at both the federal and provincial/territorial levels.

The vendor has worked through and resolved any issues with more than 300 clients globally and to date no data has been subpoenaed and there has been no extraordinary access to exam or candidate information by U.S. or any other government. They have worked with the Office of Privacy Commissioner in Canada, are *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA) compliant and are compliant with various privacy/security ISO and other industry standards.

## **Q. What about the *US Patriot Act*?**

**A.** The *US Patriot Act* is one of the several security-related pieces of legislation passed in 2001, including the *Canadian Anti-Terrorism Act*. The 10 regulators will ensure during negotiations that personal information is safeguarded in accordance with Canadian privacy standards.

## **Q: Will using the NCLEX impact on the mobility of Canadian nurses?**

**A:** Although the use of the NCLEX may facilitate the licensure process for Canadian RNs applying to practise in the U.S., the regulators do not anticipate this will result in a mass exodus of Canadian nurses. In fact, the NCLEX was written in Canada back in the '50s and '60s – and there is no record at that time of a mass exodus of Canadian RNs to the United States.

Nursing has always been considered a 'mobile' profession. However, it is important to keep in mind there are many variables that can impact nurses' mobility. For instance, one of the key variables leading to the outmigration of Canadian nurses in the past decade has been employment, or lack thereof. The vast majority of registered nurses appear to prefer to practise in their 'home' provinces/territories, and will only relocate when there are no available employment opportunities. While facilitating licensure could be a variable that impacts the mobility of future RNs, it is unlikely it will be the number one factor.

## **Q. When will the computer adaptive RN entry exam be introduced?**

**A.** The goal is to introduce the new exam in January 2015.



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## **Q. How will the exam be administered?**

- A.** The exam administration includes the following elements:
- exam-writing testing centres available across Canada
  - online 24/7/365 scheduling in English and French
  - online call centre support in English and French
  - online review and practice tests
  - quarterly reporting to regulatory bodies on psychometric reliability/statistics
  - web-based dashboard for candidate reporting
  - reliable scoring model

## **Q. How does this decision affect RNANT/NU's relationship with CNA?**

**A.** RNANT/NU will maintain its strong relationship with CNA. The president of RNANT/NU will continue to sit and actively participate on the CNA board and represent the best interests of NT/NU registered nurses, Canadian registered nurses and the public. RNANT/NU recognizes and supports CNA as the national professional voice of registered nurses, advancing the practice of nursing and the profession in a publicly-funded, not-for-profit health system.

## **Q. Which Canadian regulators participated in the search for an exam provider?**

- A.** The participating regulators are the following:
- College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia
  - College of Nurses of Ontario
  - College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta
  - College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba
  - Nurses Association of New Brunswick
  - College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia
  - Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador
  - Association of Registered Nurses of Prince Edward Island
  - Registered Nurses Association of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut
  - Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association

## **RNANT/NU would like to acknowledge:**

Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association (SRNA)  
College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA)  
College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia (CRNNS)  
National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN)