

Nursing Students Concerned with Release of First Round of NCLEX-RN Results

[October 21st, 2015]

As the national voice of nursing students across Canada, the Canadian Nursing Students' Association (CNSA) is concerned for our current and future nursing students following the release of the preliminary National Council Licensure Exam - Registered Nurse (NCLEX-RN®) results. As there has been a concerning decrease in passing averages both provincially and nationally, CNSA is advocating for our 29,000 members across Canada who are the future of health care. The nursing community must ensure that all students are being examined using a proper assessment tool that effectively measures our Canadian entry-to-practice competencies and is equitable for our bilingual nation. With a nursing shortage that has led to serious implications to the health care system, we must address these concerns with urgency and strength.

Background

In 2011, Canada's ten regulatory bodies announced the formation of a contract approving the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), the current administrator of the American NCLEX-RN®, to be the new administrator of Canada's entry-to-practice nursing exam. As of January 2015, the NCLEX-RN® has replaced the long-standing Canadian Registered Nurse Examination (CRNE) as the official entry-to-practice examination for nursing students. Well-founded concerns from Canadian stakeholders regarding the harmonization of the NCLEX-RN® are related to the following national elements: (a) appropriate reflection of the Canadian health care system values; (b) consideration of cultural competence with respect to Canada's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis populations; (c) proper reflection of Canadian nursing programs; and (d) representation of Canada's two official languages. Despite these concerns from stakeholders, the NCLEX-RN® was officially implemented in Canada with less than desirable outcomes for our students. Nationally, 4,701 nursing students wrote the NCLEX-RN® between the months of January and June 2015. The pass rate for candidates who wrote during this period is 70.6%, which is lower than the American pass rate of 78.3% (<http://www.ccrnr.ca/assets/main-report-canadian-nclex-rn-pass-rate-analysis-q1-q2-2015.pdf>). Considering the pass rate is approximately 10% lower than the previous CRNE, the CNSA feels immediate actions must be taken to ensure all Canadian nursing students are being fairly examined and provided with the proper preparation resources.

Progress

CNSA has worked hard to be a resource and support for our members by offering the document, "Tips for Nursing Students: Preparing to Write the NCLEX-RN®," which includes general information about the exam, question structure/format, and tips when writing a computer-adaptive test (CAT). Both a resolution and position statement on NCLEX-RN® advocacy were passed at our 2013 and 2015 National conferences, which has engaged our members in the conversation of entry-to-practice examination, and encouraged our stakeholders and schools to have an active role in these changes. These statements have helped shape the

activities, goals, and objectives of our organization, and have created a dialogue with our regional and national stakeholders around the introduction of the NCLEX-RN®. Understanding the financial responsibility that comes with purchasing NCLEX-RN® prep resources, we have also provided our members with a discount on Lippincott NCLEX-RN® materials. Companies who prepare NCLEX-RN® preparation tools are also offered the opportunity to be a part of our Regional and National conferences in order to provide information and resources to our members, while answering questions and concerns at the same time.

Recommendations

The NCLEX-RN® constitutes a major change in entry-to-practice in Canada, and it is critical that all stakeholders in the nursing profession adapt and change their policies to reflect this fundamental shift. Considering the recent exam results and how they will affect our students and the health care system, CNSA feels there are actions that need to be taken immediately. What has been most evident and alarming is the low pass rate (54.3%) in provinces with Francophone students, and the lack of preparation support and resources for this population. CNSA requests the immediate creation of proper NCLEX-RN® preparation tools for Francophone students, as well as a third party revision of the current NCLEX-RN® to ensure proper translation into the French language and provide equal opportunity for success to all Canadian nursing students. We are proud to be a bilingual country and a bilingual national association, therefore CNSA will continue to advocate for our Francophone students regarding the NCLEX-RN®.

The limited amount of attempts Canadian nursing students are able to write the NCLEX-RN® is another urgent issue to address. Since the NCLEX-RN® was introduced in Canada, nursing students are allowed a maximum of three attempts to write and pass the NCLEX-RN®. If a student were to be unsuccessful after three attempts, the regulating body of that province/territory has the ability to review the application and determine whether extenuating circumstances exist that would allow the student another attempt to write. Otherwise, nursing students are required to complete another approved or equivalent nursing program before another attempt may be made. In the United States, the NCSBN's policy allows students to rewrite the NCLEX-RN® up to eight times in one year, with no more than one attempt being made in a forty-five day period, yet individual jurisdictions are able to create policies of their own. In thirty-nine out of fifty states, students are able to rewrite the exam an unlimited number of times, with no need for students to retake a nursing program such as in Canada. Most nursing programs in Canada are a four year commitment. While working through the challenges of the NCLEX transition into Canada, asking students to retake their nursing degree is an unreasonable and financially devastating scenario, which will continue to add strain onto our already taxed health care system. CNSA recommends that provincial regulators increase the number of writing attempts for the NCLEX-RN® as is offered to American nursing students while we continue to navigate between the shift in exams. We feel a maximum of three attempts is not supporting nursing students through this transitional period, and consideration of change in policy is a top priority.



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Lastly, CNSA urges all educational institutions to incorporate study guides and preparation support for the NCLEX-RN® into their curriculum to ensure they are using current practices that best support our students. This is important while Canada uses the NCLEX as their entry to practice examination. Anecdotal evidence from schools across the country has shown that schools that have integrated NCLEX-RN® preparation into their curriculum and ensured students are equipped to use study tools and strategies, have had higher pass rates. It is also important that the efficacy of these study tools, programs and strategies are grounded in evidence.

Moving forward, we will continue our collaboration with our national stakeholders – the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN), and the Canadian Federation of Nursing Unions (CFNU) – to ensure continued advocacy for our nursing students regarding our national licensure exam. We are encouraged by our stakeholders in the nursing community who have rallied in support of Canadian nursing students through their dedication in working together for the benefit of our future health care leaders. It is our hope that these recommendations will help to give Canadian students fair and equal opportunity to succeed when preparing for and writing the NCLEX-RN®. We strongly believe in our members and their abilities, and we hope they can be confident that CNSA will be their advocate throughout this transition.

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