

Briefing Note

To: CNSA's Official Delegates, January 2016

Issue:

Since the adoption of the NCLEX, the new entry to practice exam for Registered Nurses in Canada in January 2015, there has been over a 10% decrease in pass rates since the CRNE exam, an outcry from nursing students over the emotional, financial and professional consequences, a lack of French resources for francophone nursing students and concern from stakeholders of the short and long term impacts on the nursing profession.

Background:

In 2011, Canada's ten regulatory bodies who are the buyers of the entry to practice exam (with the exception of Quebec) issued a Request for Proposal and awarded the contract to the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN), the current administrator of the American NCLEX-RN®. 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.ccnr.ca/assets/main-report-canadian-nclex-rn-pass-rate-analysis-q1-q2-2015.pdf>).

Both a resolution and position statement on NCLEX 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.¹

National Nursing Stakeholders have also written press releases or taken action to address issues pertaining to the NCLEX-RN®. Please view the following for further information

Canadian Nurses Association

Hosted NCLEX roundtable with nursing stakeholders to address the NCLEX issues; Featured article in *Canadian Nurse Magazine* to address NCLEX issues; Press Release: Nursing

¹ Canadian Nursing Student's Association
<http://www.cnsa.ca/files/files/2015%20Documents/NCLEX%20Position%20Statement.pdf>

Profession Concerned with First NCLEX-RN results <https://cna-aiic.ca/news-room/news-releases/2015/nursing-profession-concerned-with-first-nclex-rn-results>

Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing

CASN has done a review of the adaptation and translation process and significant concerns were noted. The analysis will be available on the CASN website in the near future.

Press Release: New American Entry-to-Practice Exam a Failure for Canadian Nursing Students and For Canada: <http://www.casn.ca/2015/09/new-american-entry-to-practice-exam-a-failure-for-canadian-nursing-students-and-for-canada-ottawa-sept-9-2015/>

Comparison of the Canadian Entry-Level Competencies and the NCLEX-RN® Detailed Test Plan: <http://www.casn.ca/2015/11/comparison-of-the-canadian-entry-level-competencies-and-the-nclex-rn-detailed-test-plan/>

Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions

October, 2015: Wrote to CNA about CFNU concerns with the NCLEX highlighting the impact it was having on student nurses and upon the sustainability of the health care workforce; December, 2015: Wrote to provincial health ministers requesting an immediate systemic review of the NCLEX to address the high NCLEX failure rates, the inequities created by the lack of nation-wide harmonized regulatory standards (re: number of writes, working when failed, length of temporary licenses, etc.), the lack of student supports, particularly for francophone students, and the lack of acknowledgement from provincial/territorial nursing regulatory bodies that the transition to the NCLEX has been a failure. CFNU provincial affiliates have organized meetings with relevant stakeholders in their provinces (regulators, educators, government) to address, among other issues, the number of times a student can write the NCLEX and the period of temporary registration. These efforts have resulted in changes including in New Brunswick on December 11, 2015

Nurses Association of New Brunswick

Press Release NANB Board Implements Regulation Changes to Support Nursing Graduates http://www.nanb.nb.ca/media/resource/NANB-PressRelease-NCLEX-RN_-2015-12-11-E.pdf

Ontario Nurses Association

Letter from ONA president Linda Haslam-Stroud to CEO of the College of Nurses of Ontario https://www.ona.org/documents/File/onanews/ONA_NCLEXLetter_toCNO_201508.pdf

This letter documents the concerns related to the loss of the provisional licensure in Ontario in the event of an unsuccessful first attempt of the NCLEX based on Ontario's current legislation.

Current Situation:

CNSA had reached out and advocated to national and provincial nursing stakeholders of the regulatory bodies, nursing unions, and professional associations and to government to engage in dialogue and support nursing students in regards to NCLEX issues. We reached out to our members and past members to identify the key concerns for nursing students to best advocate on

the most pressing matters related to the NCLEX both long term and short term. The CNSA Executive Committee members are active participants in advocating for students pertaining to the NCLEX as voting board members on the Canadian Nurses Association, Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, and an associate member organization on the board of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions.

Given the concerns over the preliminary results and the outcry from CNSA members and stakeholders CNSA wrote a press release on October 2015 asking for immediate action to

- Address the translation issues and lack of French resources for Francophone students;
- Increase the amount of attempts available to students while the issues pertaining to the NCLEX are being addressed, and;
- Urge all educational institutions to incorporate study guides and preparation support for the NCLEX into their curriculum to ensure they are using current practices that best support our students.

For full CNSA press release please go to:

<http://www.cnsa.ca/files/files/2015%20Documents/NCLEX%20Position%20Statement.pdf>

On November 13th 2015 CCRNR responded to numerous stakeholders and CNSA's press release with a letter stating

“As the regulators, our requirement for this entry-to-practice exam is not to test all that educators have taught in a 4-year curriculum. The NCLEX-RN meets our requirements for a national entry exam that determines if applicants have the competencies needed in their first year of nursing practice, such as: pain management; medication administration; basic care and comfort; safety and infection control; and, health promotion and maintenance. These competencies are neither “American” nor “Canadian.” The exam is not testing the writer’s knowledge of a particular health care system, history or legislation. It is also not testing for cultural based competencies in nursing care. Testing for such knowledge is not the purpose of the NCLEX-RN.”²

The letter also states

- That the exam was reviewed by Canadians,
- That due diligence was ensured to ensure “no American content”,
- To use caution in encouraging the use of third-party prep material,
- That CCRNR ensured due diligence in French translation,
- That the preliminary results include first time writers bias and therefore conclusions cannot be drawn at this time, and
- That CCRNR is dedicated to the safety of Canadians and the NCLEX meets the required entry to practice requirements and is accountable to Canadians.

² Canadian Council of Registered Nurse Regulators, letter to the author, 13 NOV. 2015

The CNSA board of Directors appreciated the response from CCRNR however they felt that the concerns expressed in our press release and its call to action were not adequately addressed in the letter and a meeting with the CEO was requested however there has been no response since.

On November 25th, 2015 CNSA attended the NCLEX roundtable meeting hosted by CNA to address NCLEX concerns with national nursing stakeholders. The purpose of the roundtable was:

- To understand and confirm the selected operational/logistical issues associated with the NCLEX exam;
- To develop principles to support nursing students writing the exam in the short term; and
- To agree on an action plan, accountability and timelines.

Discussions focused on sharing information, identifying the impact of and suggesting actions for four key issues:

- French resources
- Exam writings
- Costs
- Student supports

CNSA advocated for nursing students by addressing the roundtable to describe the tremendous far reaching impact the transition to the NCLEX exam has had on students from financial, psychological, employability, and spiritual aspects. CNSA's objectives were discussed as per the statement released in October. All items were discussed at great length however due to the complexity of the issues and the diverse views of each stakeholder on the many topics reviewed further discussion and collaboration is needed in order to move forward collaboratively. Three key recommendations emerged from the roundtable:

1. Nursing regulatory bodies work with appropriate partners to review the numerous concerns in regards to the French version of the NCLEX exam and Francophone student writers in this report and make appropriate policy changes in all jurisdictions where there are French writers.
2. The Canadian Nurses Association and appropriate partners develop/disseminate exam preparatory resources to support students writing the exam.
3. CCRNR continue its work with the goal of harmonizing the number of exam writes according to best practice and policies related to temporary/graduate nurse licenses.

CNSA agreed to the following terms to support the recommendations:

- CNSA will accumulate and disseminate accommodations available to students
- CNSA will establish communities of practice and mentorship programs for students preparing to write the NCLEX
- CNSA will generate awareness of available free exam preparatory tools with students (i.e. test plan) by generating lists and distributing them to universities and colleges for them to share with students³

³ Canadian Nurses Association *NCLEX:RN Roundtable: Student Supports*, Canadian Nurses Association, Ottawa, 2015

In November and December the CNSA BOD had two additional board meetings to discuss the NCLEX roundtable and decide on the best action to take in addressing NCLEX issues in the short term and long term.

Key Concerns:

- The nursing community and national stakeholders are not unified in their decisions on how to address NCLEX issues.
- Legislation varies amongst provinces creating different issues for each region within CNSA and inequities among nursing students nationally.
- The decreased pass rate contributes to the nursing shortage that already exists nationally and is projected to worsen in coming years which impacts Canada's health care as a whole.
- The NCLEX does not appear to uphold the Canadian constitution for bilingualism in its translation or in its equality in resources to francophone students
- The NCLEX does not reflect Canadian health care values and the core competencies set out by the provincial nursing regulatory bodies. There is a risk of how this will impact nursing curriculum, the nursing profession and as a result Canadian health care as a whole.
- Due to the multitude of options available, the difficulties in the transition to the NCLEX and the uncertainty of nursing institution in endorsing NCLEX prep materials that not all students are being prepared equally for the exam.

Recommendations:

- That CNSA utilize the united power of its 30,000 members to establish a firm stance on the NCLEX and provide clear recommendations to stakeholders that best support nursing students, the nursing profession and the health of Canadians.
- That during this transitional time and given the complex issues currently involved with the NCLEX based on the emotional, financial, and professional costs to students, the BOD recommends that a pause be instated until the NCLEX issues are resolved.
- That CNSA collaborate on timelines and resources that need to be implemented in order to best support the students who will write in the immediate future and what alternatives are available while such a pause would be in effect.
- That CNSA seriously address the inadequate adaptation to the Canadian context, the translation of the NCLEX, and lack of French resources for francophone students that constitutes a potential human rights violation.
- That given CNSA's commitment to Canadian competencies including the social determinants of health, relational practice, interprofessionalism, primary health care, the provision of holistic care, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations, among others, that are reflected in CNSA's committees (Global Health, Community and

Public Health, Indigenous Advocacy, etc.) that CNSA and other stakeholders explore the risks to the erosion of Canadian nursing education, practice and healthcare.

- That CNSA urge for immediate action from the nursing community to support nursing students and the nursing profession.
- That CNSA continue to reach out to stakeholders and engage in any further discussion or collaboration to best support nursing students and to resolve these distressing and urgent issues.