



Canadian Nursing Students' Association Association des étudiant(e)s infirmier(ère)s du Canada

Position Statement

Canadian Nursing Curriculum At Risk

The effects and implications of the National Council Licensure Examination - Registered Nurse (NCLEX-RN®)

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Background

In 2011, the Canadian Council of Registered Nurse Regulators (CCRN), which consists of Canada's provincial/territorial regulatory bodies, decided that the American NCLEX-RN® would be Canada's new entry-to-practice nursing exam (Quebec and Yukon excluded) in a new contract with the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN). Since January 2015 the trusted and established Canadian Registered Nurse Examination (CRNE) has been replaced by the American NCLEX-RN® as the approved entry-to-practice nursing exam for Canadian nursing graduates. Despite promises that the new exam would reflect Canadian nursing curriculum and competencies in both official languages, exam writers have expressed that the exam is heavily American-based and not applicable in the context of the Canadian health care system (McGillis Hall, Lalonde, Kashin, 2016). Two years later justifiable concerns continue since the adoption of the NCLEX-RN® as the new standard for nursing competency, and they are as follows: (a) proper consideration of Canadian health care system values; (b) consideration of



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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 (CNSA, 2016).

Through these voiced concerns, students have begun to see a change in their curriculum. Many students have reported the addition of NCLEX-RN® preparatory materials to their required resources and those materials being used as evaluative components (Stinnissen, 2016; Bourque, 2016; Patrick, 2016). Students have noticed the addition of these materials has taken away portions of their curriculum that they deem necessary and important to their Canadian nursing education as a whole (Stinnissen, 2016; Bourque, 2016; Patrick, 2016). Some students have even indicated that their clinical time is being reduced in order to complete these newly added evaluative components (Stinnissen, 2016; Bourque, 2016; Patrick, 2016). The Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN)'s Executive Director, Cynthia Baker, states that "Canadian nursing education is highly respected internationally and we should not be changing that to fit the needs of the U.S." (Barton, 2016). In the end, instead of acquiring important Canadian nursing knowledge, students wanting to become a Canadian Registered Nurse (RN) are focusing the latter portion of their education on passing an exam with specific American content (Stinnissen, 2016; Bourque, 2016; Patrick, 2016); an exam which does not effectively test Canadian nursing's own competencies (CASN, 2012; CASN, 2015a; CASN, 2015b; CASN, 2015c).

Canadian Nursing Students' Association (CNSA) POSITION

The Canadian Nursing Students' Association believes that nursing schools should not adapt our highly respected Canadian curricula to fit the needs of this new exam which may result in decreased educational standards than those under the previous exam (Barton, 2016). In addition, students should not be required to purchase mandatory NCLEX-RN® preparatory materials that are arranged and forced onto students by these educational institutions. Moreover, there has been no evidence to suggest that using any specific preparatory material is correlated with increasing NCLEX-RN® pass rates (Wiltshire, 2016).

Nursing students are currently reporting an increase in the use of NCLEX-RN® preparatory materials as part of their evaluative components. Students have also reported that they feel this increased presence in NCLEX-RN® materials has taken away from other valuable learning opportunities that they would have normally had in previous years (Patrick, 2016). Students of earlier years have come forward to the later years reporting that they are not receiving the same education their peers did just a year before them. Furthermore, accessibility to learning is reduced when students are expected to bring a laptop to classes in order to participate or write exams using these mandatory NCLEX-RN® preparatory materials (Patrick, 2016). Members of the Canadian Nursing Students' Association have seen a major shift in how NCLEX-RN® is being incorporated into the curriculum and we, as an organization, believe this is limiting students from fully learning the competencies that lie outside the scope of the examination.

Those competencies that are outside the scope of testable material are at risk of being deemed less important and are currently being phased out by some universities to accommodate NCLEX-RN® materials. The CNSA believes that in order to create competent, well-rounded Registered Nurses we must develop holistic nursing education that encompasses every aspect of becoming a Canadian Registered Nurse and not just the portions that are covered on this exam.

In addition, CNSA is committed to working in collaboration with the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN) and other valued stakeholders to ensure that the future of our nursing education is not at stake due to this exam. CNSA will encourage CASN to take a firm stance against the implementation of these preparatory materials into our curriculum and encourage educational institutions to comply with this stance. In addition, CNSA will recommend that during CASN accreditation this will be taken into consideration.



Relation to Canadian Nursing School Curriculum

The Canadian nursing curriculum is highly respected internationally and certain competencies embedded within it are at risk of being forgotten with the implementation of NCLEX-RN® materials. Canadian nursing students are now at risk of missing out on valuable learning opportunities in the classroom and in clinical placements as a result of these recent implementations. Students are being forced to focus more of their time on NCLEX-RN® preparatory materials, taking away from their studies that truly educate them to become competent Canadian RNs. Canadian curriculum is at risk of harmonization with American curriculum when distinct differences are evident and importantly define our healthcare system and the diverse individuals we serve as Canadian nurses (CASN, 2012; CASN, 2015a; CASN, 2015b; CASN, 2015c).

Conclusion

The Canadian Nursing Students' Association believes that nursing schools should not adapt their highly respected Canadian curricula to fit the needs of this new exam which may result in decreased educational standards than those under the previous exam (Barton, 2016). In addition students should not be required to purchase specific mandatory NCLEX-RN® preparatory materials that are forced on the students and selected by their educational institutions.

There is evidence of the implementation of mandatory preparatory materials across jurisdictions, and its effects on students' education and learning opportunities. CNSA does not support educational institutions forcing these materials upon students. While it is important that educators provide the support and necessary tools for their students to succeed, this should not come at the cost of the core foundations of our Canadian nursing curricula. The disappearance of Canadian nursing content from our curricula is alarming and cannot be allowed to continue. We encourage nurse educators in each educational institution to consider an appropriate amount of NCLEX-RN preparatory materials integration into the curriculum in a collaborative manner, including but not limited to consultation and discussion with your student body and fellow nurse educators. However, we implore educators to ensure that students' grades and valuable clinical experiences are not negatively impacted by this integration. Ultimately, we are committed to minimizing the negative impacts of mandatory NCLEX-RN® integration on our nursing curriculum and continuing to uphold the quality of our Canadian nursing education.

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