

Pediatric Nursing Certification Board Statement

This notice is an update for all CPNP-AC exam stakeholders.

July 17, 2019 – The Pediatric Nursing Certification Board (PNCB) is deeply committed to the health of our nation’s children and to ensuring that each nurse certified by PNCB has the knowledge and skills required to provide excellent care for them. To this end, it is critical that we protect the integrity of our CPNP-AC certification process and the validity of examination results.

In February 2019, we became aware of a security breach that exposed trade secret, copyright-protected, secure content contained in the Acute Care Certified Pediatric Nurse Practitioner (CPNP-AC®) board examination and we immediately communicated suspended testing and communicated to our stakeholders about our discovery of the breach. We also promptly launched a comprehensive investigation of the matter to determine the full scope of the breach and how it may have impacted CPNP-AC exam results.

The investigation, which remains ongoing at this time, revealed that a number of nurses who took the CPNP-AC exam over the past three years memorized and reconstructed trade secret, copyright-protected CPNP-AC exam content, and then shared that content with other

nurses and third parties that provide test preparation services to nurses preparing for the CPNP-AC exam. This activity, known as brain dumping, is strictly prohibited in writing by the agreement that all CPNP-AC candidates must accept when they complete the CPNP-AC exam application, PNCB's Code of Ethics, the Candidate Handbook and a reminder displayed on the final screen at end of the exam at the testing center.

Candidates with advance access to CPNP-AC exam content unquestionably obtain an unearned advantage on the exam, and their scores are not a valid indicator that they have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide safe and competent advanced nursing acute care to children.

Unfortunately, PNCB has determined that a number of nurses who received passing scores on the CPNP-AC exam within the past three years obtained an unearned advantage on the exam because they received advance access to PNCB's breached CPNP-AC exam content. Accordingly, we will have to invalidate the exam scores of those nurses, and they will have to re-take a secure, valid form of the CPNP-AC exam to ensure that they meet the knowledge standards required of CPNP-ACs, and to maintain the trust of PNCB's stakeholders and the public.

PNCB will provide written notification in July 2019 to nurses who are required to re-test to maintain their CPNP-AC credential.

The designation of CPNP-AC is rendered meaningless if the families of pediatric patients, their physicians, the hospital systems where they receive care, state boards of nursing and the public may be concerned that the nurses who achieved their PNCB certification were able to do so only because they obtained an unearned advantage on the CPNP-AC exam.

Excellence and safety in patient care remain our highest priorities, and the best way that we can ensure that all CPNP-AC nurses meet PNCB's knowledge and care standards is to maintain the integrity of our certification program and the validity of examination results.

Our Position

Brain dumping is a violation of trade secret and copyright law, and a violation of the agreements that candidates enter with PNCB in order to take the exam. Perhaps most importantly, brain dumping is a serious violation of professional ethical nursing standards. Patient safety cannot be compromised, and we must ensure that all CPNP-ACs have demonstrated the knowledge and skills necessary to provide excellent care for acutely ill pediatric patients.

Testing Status

PNCB has produced new secure, valid test forms for the CPNP-AC exam that do not include compromised exam questions and are only available in predetermined testing windows. The next testing opportunity for Acute Care PNP candidates is August 1st through November 22nd. Those interested in sitting for the exam should visit the PNCB website for detailed eligibility and application information (<https://www.pncb.org/cpnp-ac>). We regret that this may interrupt employment options for some candidates.

Protective Measures

As our investigation proceeds, we have implemented additional processes that could help deter, prevent and detect brain dumping and other unethical exam preparation conduct in the future. Most recently, we have done the following:

- Revised the Code of Ethics and Candidate Handbook to provide additional examples of unethical behavior and emphasize that brain dumping and sharing of exam content has always been and remains a serious ethical violation.
- Changed our re-test policy. If a candidate fails the exam, PNCB now requires longer waiting periods between testing opportunities and a requirement for documentation of targeted remedial education based on exam performance weaknesses prior to applying again. As a result, candidates will be limited to 3 testing opportunities in a 12-month period.

- Implemented ongoing, in-depth internet monitoring to search websites and other internet-based platforms for trade secret, copyright-protected PNCB exam items and practice test content.

Anyone who thinks they may have been affected by this matter or has questions should call 888-641-2767 Monday through Friday, 9am to 5pm EDT or email us at exam@pncb.org.