

March 27, 2020

Dear Program Directors:

The State Board of Nursing (Board) has been receiving inquiries from nursing education programs relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Governor's Emergency declarations on Pennsylvania's nursing education programs. Although many issues are in flux due to the unknown length of the pandemic, the following provides some responses to the inquiries.

### ***Clinical Hours***

The Board has been asked how Programs should accomplish their clinical hour requirements in light of state-mandated Program suspensions and clinical site adjustments/closures. This determination should be made by the Programs using the following construct contained in the Board's regulations:

- Programs must implement a comprehensive nursing education plan of study that includes an integrated didactic and clinical component taught according to evidence-based practice leading to the knowledge and skills essential to the practice of professional or practical nursing and culminates in a degree, diploma, or certificate.
- Learning experiences and methods of instruction must provide experience in the care of men, women, and children.
- The allocation of credit hours or clock hours must be consistent with the practice of the institution.
- The use of simulation hours and their ratio to clinical hours must be based on national standards such as put forth by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) or International Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning (INACSL).

For ***RN Programs***, the regulations do not prescribe a specific number of clinical or didactic hours, nor the ratio of hours for didactic to clinical instruction or clinical to simulated instruction. For ***PN Programs***, the regulations require 60% clinical hours and 40% didactic hours.

Because the Board was aware of a disruption to many Programs, on March 10<sup>th</sup>, it sent an email via ST-eppiccNURSE advising that if a Program determined it was necessary to alter its method of curriculum delivery or clinical hours, the Program should inform the Board of the proposed action to be taken and provide a plan to assure that students continue to attain the learning objectives during the period of the emergency declaration.

The Board has been accepting written plans by email and acknowledges them upon receipt. Following review to assure that students could continue to achieve their learning outcomes, the plans are placed in the Program's file.

If a Program's plan has since changed due to the continuing emergency declaration, a revised plan, along with its rationale must be submitted.

### **Completion Requirements for Senior Students and Admission Requirements for New Students**

The Board has also been asked how Programs should address end of year requirements, including capstones and senior practicum, and whether a new semester/term may be commenced during the pandemic. Again, these decisions must be made by Programs based upon their individual plans of study, their ability to achieve their learning objectives by alternate methods and their technological capabilities within the construct mentioned above.

Nursing education verification forms, evidencing program completion, must continue to be submitted to the Board via ST-eppiccNURSE following the established process.

### **NCLEX® – Test Centers**

Pearson Vue has advised the Board and applicants for the NCLEX® examinations who hold ATTs that they expect to open a limited number of test centers across the United States. The Board posted a notice on its website advising graduates that if they desire to practice while they are waiting to take the NCLEX®, they should apply and pay for a graduate practice permit. Because ATT holders have applied for licensure, they do not need to supply any documents along with the application other than pay the fee.

For graduates who held permits that are set to expire within 90 days, the Governor has granted an extension for 90 days. Additional information about “COVID-19 Impact to NCLEX® Candidates” is available at [www.ncsbn.org](http://www.ncsbn.org) and [www.pearsonvue.com/nclex](http://www.pearsonvue.com/nclex).

### **Pass Rates**

Programs have also asked whether there will be any leniency in the requirement that they achieve an 80% pass rate for first time test takers during the October 1, 2019-September 30, 2020, examination year or be placed on provisional status. Because the Board cannot predict the length of the pandemic, it cannot advise at this time whether there will be any impact on pass rates. The Board will monitor pass rates and any ramifications of delayed testing and review any documentation from NCSBN regarding national averages. Any action taken by the Board will be relayed to Programs.

Programs that choose to offer online examination preparation during the pandemic should advise their graduates directly.

### **Program Resources:**

- Please check the Department of State ([www.dos.pa.gov](http://www.dos.pa.gov)), Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs (<https://www.dos.pa.gov/ProfessionalLicensing/Pages/Bureau-of-Professional-and-Occupational-Affairs.aspx>) and the Board of Nursing’s websites ([www.dos.pa.gov/nurse](http://www.dos.pa.gov/nurse)) as they are continually being updated.