



Four Steps to Continuing Competency

NCC Core Maintenance Program

STEP

one

Current Licensure

STEP

two

Complete a
**Continuing Competency
Assessment (CCA)**
every maintenance cycle

STEP

three

Obtain an Education Plan

STEP

four

Earn and Document CE
based on Your Individualized
Education Plan

Only CE earned AFTER you have taken your assessment can be used to maintain your certification. CE must address the needs specified by your education plan.

NCC

NATIONAL CERTIFICATION CORPORATION

NCC core certification maintenance involves **four major steps** to demonstrate continued knowledge of your certification specialty knowledge competencies. **Step 2** requires a *Continuing Competency Assessment (CCA)*:



Only CE earned AFTER completion of a Continuing Competency Assessment (CCA) can be used for NCC certification maintenance and all CE earned must address the needs as outlined by the individualized Education Plan which is developed from your assessment.

STEP



Current Licensure

Hold a valid, current unrestricted nursing license

STEP



Complete a Continuing Competency Assessment (CCA)

Each certified nurse will complete a CCA developed for their specific area of certification to evaluate knowledge in the core competency content areas of their specialty.

STEP



Obtain an Education Plan

Based on the CCA results, an individualized Education Plan will be developed. The personalized Education Plan will identify those core competency areas upon which continuing education should focus for specialty-specific professional development that reflects current standards of practice. A specialty index of 7.5 or better (based on a 10 point scale) achieved in any of the core competencies areas will satisfy the maintenance needs for that specific specialty area. *In other words, no continuing education needs to be earned for that particular specialty competency category.* A specialty index less than 7.5 in any category or categories will generate a CE amount for the specific core category. Upon completion of a CCA, the specialty index report and resulting Education Plan will be maintained and accessible from an individual's personal website account and available in their online maintenance application for tracking Education Plan progress. A description of how the specialty index report is generated and transitions to the personalized Education Plan as well as an example of a Specialty Index Report and its related Education Plan can be found on Page 9.

NCC core certification maintenance involves **four major steps** to demonstrate continued knowledge of your certification specialty knowledge competencies. **Step 2** requires a *Continuing Competency Assessment (CCA)*:



Only CE earned AFTER completion of a Continuing Competency Assessment (CCA) can be used for NCC certification maintenance and all CE earned must address the needs as outlined by the individualized Education Plan which is developed from your assessment.

STEP



Earn and Document CE based on Your Individualized Education Plan

The number of continuing education (CE) hours and the content of the continuing education to be completed will be reflected in the Education Plan. Each certificant will have a personalized online maintenance application designed to facilitate documentation of CE earned to meet the content hour needs outlined by their Education Plan. CE can be earned from completion of accredited continuing education activities or from NCC CE modules. CE can be entered as it is earned and saved for re-access later to indicate progress in completion of the Education Plan. CE earned for successful completion of any NCC CE or pre-test will automatically be entered and coded to the applicable specialty code within the personal certification maintenance application. The certificant can enter and review the maintenance application as often as necessary and then submit it when they are ready.

NCC Credentials that Do Not Require Completion of a Continuing Competency Assessment (CCA)

Individuals holding NCC credentials for the retired core certifications or subspecialty certifications listed below have no changes in the process to maintain their NCC credential. All NCC certifications must be maintained every three years as indicated by their individual maintenance cycle deadline date.

Maintenance Requirements Remain At:

Retired Core Certifications

45 hours of CE in content directly related to the certification specialty

Subspecialty Certification

15 hours of CE in content directly related to the subspecialty area

Discontinued/Retired Core Certifications

- ANA-MCH Joint Certification in Maternal, Gynecological and Neonatal Nursing
- Reproductive Endocrinology/Infertility Nursing
- Ambulatory Women's Health Care Nursing
- High Risk Obstetric Nursing
- Telephone Nursing Practice

Subspecialty Certification *(current and discontinued)*

- Electronic Fetal Monitoring - **Current**
- Breastfeeding – **Discontinued**
- Menopause Clinician and Educator - **Discontinued**
- Neonatal Pediatric Transport – **Current**
- Reproductive Gynecologic Health - **Discontinued**
- Obstetrics for the Primary Care Nurse Practitioner - **Discontinued**



The CCA is now an integral part of the NCC CORE maintenance program. An assessment will need to be completed at the beginning of each maintenance cycle and the resulting education plan will identify the CE hours and the nature of CE needed to maintain your NCC certification every maintenance cycle.

The Continuing Competency Assessment (CCA) How Does it Work?

The maintenance program for core certification requires a continuing competency assessment (CCA) designed to provide individualized certification maintenance needs for continuing education in support of the certification specialty's core knowledge competencies for each certification maintenance cycle.

The results of the CCA does not affect an individual's certification status as the assessment is used solely as a mechanism for directing the amount and content of the continuing education required for maintenance of an NCC credential.

There is a CCA for each NCC active core certification specialty.

Each CCA:

- is comprised of 125 items reflecting the topic content and distribution of the current core certification examination in a specialty and its aligned knowledge competencies using 4 major specialty areas (See Pages 11-12 for a listing of each specialty's core competency areas)
- has no fee for access and completion
- carries no pass/fail or minimum score status
- provides 5 hours of CE awarded by NCC toward the CE requirements for the maintenance cycle in which it is completed
- can be accessed at NCCwebsite.org
- is available on-demand on a 24/7 basis to meet each individual's personal schedule
- has a generous 2 hour 15 minute time allotment **requiring a single, no exit session for completion.**

Upon completion of the CCA:

- assessment results in the form of a specialty index report and an Education Plan are immediately available
- the results and Education Plan are accessible only in the individual certified nurse's password protected NCC website account

When to Complete the CAA

The CCA should be completed at the beginning of each new maintenance cycle. Although there is no deadline for completion; it is expected that individuals will complete the assessment tool at the beginning of the new maintenance cycle since **NO CE earned prior to when the assessment is complete and the Education Plan is available** can be applied to that cycle. The Education Plan is designed from the CCA and outlines the required CE for the new maintenance cycle.

For planning purposes, NCC does allow individuals who have submitted and received approval on their current certification maintenance cycle application to complete their CCA up to 90 days prior to the current cycle deadline. The Education Plan can then be used to plan for continuing education needs in the upcoming cycle and CE can be earned beginning the 1st day of the new certification maintenance cycle.

The CCA and resulting Education Plan is the standard process for NCC certification maintenance for all active core certifications and will consist of:

- Completion of a CCA that reflects the current knowledge competencies aligned with an individual's certification specialty **at the beginning of each new certification maintenance cycle**
- Use of the personalized Education Plan that develops from the assessment results to guide CE requirements for that particular maintenance cycle
- An opportunity to reduce the amount of CE required from the amount required for the previous maintenance cycle based on the potential for increased specialty index ratings each time a CCA is completed for a new maintenance cycle

The real benefit to this certification maintenance approach is re-validation that each individual NCC certified nurse is maintaining the knowledge competencies of their specialty based on current practice and examination content.

Explanation of the Specialty Index Report and the Personalized Education Plan

Core Competencies Defined

Determination of the specialty index ratings and the Education Plan that develops from the results begins with the foundation that each NCC certification specialty has a continuing competency assessment that has been developed to include core competency categories representing the specialty's content on the current certification examination. Across these core categories, a total of 50 hours of CE content is weighted and distributed also to reflect the specialty's current examination content. Some core competency areas are more heavily weighted as they reflect a content area of the current certification examination with a greater percentage of test items.

For example, the Professional Issues content on all NCC core examinations represents approximately 2% or less of the total certification examination content while content related to topics involving physiology, pathophysiology and management issues can reflect 25-35% or more of the total examination items.

Based on mathematical calculations, a specialty index rating range from 1-10 was established to address the content and item distribution for each specialty's core competency areas and the decision was made by NCC to consider a specialty index rating of 7.5 as having "met standard" so that no continuing education was indicated in any competency category with an index rating of 7.5 or higher for purposes of maintaining an NCC credential during that maintenance cycle.

Explanation of the Specialty Index Report and the Personalized Education Plan

Baseline and Core Competency Hours

As these Specialty Index Ratings are transitioned to form the individualized Education Plan, a baseline requirement of 15 hours of CE that can be obtained in any content area related to the particular specialty is added as the starting framework.

Individuals who attain 7.5 or higher specialty index ratings on all the competency content categories in their specialty will have an Education Plan requiring 15 hours of CE in the specialty content area of their choosing. *In other words, even if you achieve a specialty index rating of 7.5 or better in every core competency area, you will still need to earn 15 hours of CE. These 15 hours can be in any specialty content area shown on your Education Plan.*

Individuals attaining one or more specialty index ratings of 7.5 or higher will have baseline Education Plan CE requirements between 5-15 hours depending upon the competency categories for which the 7.5 rating(s) were attained. Plus they will need to earn the CE specified by each competency category with an index rating of less than 7.5.

If an individual has no competency content areas with 7.5 or higher ratings, there is no baseline in their Education Plan as they will need to earn the full 50 hours of CE reflected in their overall Education Plan.

Final Education Plan

Once the specialty index ratings have been transferred to form the Education Plan and a total number of CE hours by baseline and/or competency category is determined, the 5 hours of CE awarded by NCC for completion of the assessment tool is credited dropping the total CE requirement by 5 hours. For individuals with a 50 hour CE hour total, the certification maintenance CE total drops to a 45 hour requirement representing no increase from previous NCC certification maintenance requirements. For individuals with Education Plan totals less than 45 hours, the benefit of having an individualized approach to certification maintenance becomes quite clear. An additional benefit for all individuals is that the 5 hours of CE awarded by NCC for completion of the assessment can be applied to the Education Plan need of the nurse's choosing.

Specialty Index: Inpatient Obstetric Nursing Competency Assessment: Example

INP Core Competency Area

Fetal Assessment (Code 1)

*10 hours

- Antepartum assessment
- Electronic fetal monitoring
- Non-electronic fetal monitoring
- Acid-base assessment

Labor and Birth (Code 2)

*15 hours

- Physiology of labor
- Labor management
- Obstetrical procedures
- Pain management

Pregnancy and Obstetric Complications (Code 3)

*10 hours

Maternal Factors Affecting the Newborn

- Disease processes
- Pregnancy risks

Obstetric Complications

- Labor and placental disorders
- Multiple gestation
- Preterm Labor
- Prolonged pregnancy

Postpartum (Code 4)

*5 hours

- Physiology of the postpartum woman
- Family adaptation
- Lactation
- Complications of the postpartum period

Newborn (Code 5)

*5 hours

- Adaptation to extrauterine life
- Physical assessment
- Infant nutrition
- Resuscitation and Stabilization
- Complications (initial assessment/nursing interventions)

CORE COMPETENCY AREA	YOUR SPECIALTY INDEX	CE HOURS REQUIRED
Fetal Assessment (Code 1)	7.62	<i>Standard met</i>
Labor and Delivery (Code 2)	7.83	<i>Standard met</i>
Pregnancy and Obstetric Complications (Code 3)	6.84	10 hours
Postpartum (Code 4)	7.27	5 hours
Newborn (Code 5)	2.86	5 hours
Professional Practice (Code 6)	5	5 hours

Your education plan

CORE COMPETENCY AREA	CE HOURS
Pregnancy and Obstetric Complications (Code 3) Missed keywords: Disease processes affecting mother/fetus/newborn, Labor/Placental Disorders, Multiple gestation, Pregnancy Risks, Preterm labor, Prolonged pregnancy Pregnancy and Obstetric Complications (Code 3) Self Assessment modules »	10 hours
Postpartum (Code 4) Missed keywords: Anatomy and physiology of lactation, Postpartum complications, Postpartum physiology, Postpartum Psychosocial Adaptation Postpartum (Code 4) Self Assessment modules »	5 hours
Newborn (Code 5) Missed keywords: Adaptation to Extrauterine Life, Infant Nutrition, Newborn Complications, Newborn Resuscitation Newborn (Code 5) Self Assessment modules »	5 hours
Professional Practice (Code 6) Missed keywords: Ethical Principles and Theories, Patient Safety Professional Practice (Code 6) Self Assessment modules »	5 hours
15 Baseline CE hours in any of your content specific specialty areas	15 hours
Credit for taking this assessment (may be applied to any Plan CE need)	-5 hours
Total hours required	35 hours

Professional Practice (Code 6)

*5 hours

- Ethical Issues
- Legal Issues
- Patient Safety
- Research

*Number of CE hours required if you do not achieve a specialty index of 7.5 or more in the content area.

Core Certification Specialty Knowledge Competencies

Women's Health Care Nurse Practitioner

Normal Physiology and Management - 10 hours

Pathophysiology - 20 hours

Physical Assessment & Diagnostic Tools - 5 hours

Pharmacology - 10 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Inpatient Obstetric Nursing

Fetal Assessment & Labor/Delivery

- Fetal Assessment - 10 hours
- Labor and Delivery - 15 hours

Pregnancy & Obstetric Complications - 10 hours

Postpartum & Normal Newborn

- Postpartum - 5 hours
- Normal Newborn - 5 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Neonatal Intensive Care Nursing

General Assessment & Management - 15 hours

(includes risk assessment, gestational age assessment, physical examination, behavioral/psychosocial adjustment, developmental care and thermoregulation & nutrition)

Physiology & Pathophysiology - 20 hours

- System Complications
(includes fluids, electrolytes, oxygenation and homeostasis)
- Grieving Process

Pharmacology - 10 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Core Certification Specialty Knowledge Competencies

Neonatal Nurse Practitioner

Physical Assessment - 5 hours

(includes risk assessment, gestational age assessment, physical examination, clinical laboratory & diagnostic studies)

Physiology & Pathophysiology

- System Complications - 20 hours
- General Management - 10 hours
(includes thermoregulation, nutrition, fluids and electrolytes, and resuscitation and stabilization)

Pharmacology - 10 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Low Risk Neonatal Nursing

Mother/Fetus - 5 hours

Physical Assessment - 15 hours

(includes physical examination, gestational age assessment, diagnostic laboratory evaluation and behavioral assessment, thermoregulation & nutrition)

Management

- Neonatal Complications - 20 hours
(includes perinatal substance abuse & hyperbilirubinemia)
- Pharmacology - 5 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Maternal Newborn Nursing

Maternal/Neonatal Factors Affecting Outcomes - 5 hours

Postpartum Assessment & Management - 20 hours

Newborn Assessment & Management - 20 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Other Recognized Activities and Designated Hour Assignment

These activities have to be outside your expected employment responsibilities and can only be used to meet baseline requirements.

The activities described can only be used to meet baseline CE needs within the Education Plan, if available. Baseline hours are determined based on the assessment results. No more than the designated hours can be earned in each of the activities as described.

Various hours can be substituted for the following activity:

- Presentation of an accredited continuing education course will give the presenter the same amount of credit awarded to the participants attending the course. *Presentations can only be used once during a certification period.*

A total of 10 hours can be substituted for any of the following activities:

- Preceptor students in the same specialty area of certification
- Editor of a book
- Authorship of a journal article or book chapter
- Primary or secondary authorship of a book

The Benefits

The NCC maintenance program offers the NCC certified nurse the following benefits:

- Continuing education requirements will be individualized to address identified knowledge competency gaps and in many cases, total CE required will be less than the 45 hour generic standard used for years.
- Continuing education will only be required in areas identified by the individual certified nurse's assessment tool and the directed education will build on existing knowledge competencies in their specialty without requiring a one-size fits all approach to ongoing learning.
- NCC will award 5 continuing education hours each time the CCA is completed for a certification maintenance cycle. These 5 CE hours can be applied to any core area or baseline CE need.
- The CCA offers an external process that provides an objective measure of the core certification knowledge competencies aligned with a certification specialty and re-validates the NCC certified nurse's knowledge and expertise for patients, families, employers and regulatory agencies.

Maintenance Fee

The certification maintenance fee remains at \$100.

A discounted maintenance fee is still available to those individuals who complete a CCA to direct their certification maintenance cycle needs and who chose to complete 15 or more hours of CE using NCC CE modules to meet their education plan CE needs.

Earning at least **15 hours of NCC continuing education**, lowers the fee to **\$80**

Earning at least **30 hours of NCC continuing education**, lowers the fee to **\$70**

Earning at least **45 hours of NCC continuing education**, lowers the fee to **\$60**

Discounts do not apply to alternative maintenance. Alternative maintenance requires 50 CE across all core content areas.

Use of NCC CE modules is optional and not required but are available as a way to provide affordable, easily accessible CE for those who may have limited CE options in their area or practice.

Opting Out of taking the CCA to Maintain. Use of the Alternative Maintenance Pathway

The CCA is part of the NCC maintenance program for all core certifications. It is however, possible to opt out of using the CCA if you are unable to complete the assessment. For those who choose not to use or who cannot use the CCA, it is possible to opt out using the alternative maintenance pathway.

Please note that this approach is more complex, more costly and without certain benefits available to those who use take the CCA.. The process will require a statement of declaration that the individual is voluntarily opting out of the CCA. Selection of this option is made by accessing one's current online maintenance application.

50 hours of CE will be required across all core content areas for the specialty certification. Continuing education will be required in the designated amount for each core category as outlined for the certification specialty. No discounts will be afforded for the use of NCC CE modules and no alternative activities such as preceptorship and CE presentations will be recognized for CE toward maintenance using this approach. Course outlines and certificates uploaded in Word or PDF format will be required for submitting maintenance applications CE will be reviewed. The certification maintenance fee is \$175.* Additional information is available on the NCC website.

**maintenance fee and process components are subject to change*

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQS

Q If I use the Alternative Maintenance process for a maintenance cycle, does that mean I have to use that same opt out option for all upcoming certification maintenance cycles?

No, each NCC certification maintenance cycle is distinct and has its own 3 year timeframe. Once you successfully complete and submit an appropriate certification maintenance application and transition to a new maintenance cycle, you may elect to complete a CCA and follow the personalized Education Plan for the new certification maintenance cycle.

Q Why is there a higher fee if I don't take the assessment evaluation?

In order for NCC to assess that you have maintained competency in the major certification competencies, we will have to review your certificates which takes more resources and time to accomplish. The cost for that will be borne by the individual.

Q What happens if I get 7.5 specialty index in all content areas?

Your continuing education requirement would then be 15 continuing education hours in your certification specialty area, the specified topics would be of your choosing.

Q What if no continuing education options are available to me in the content areas indicated by my Education Plan?

NCC CE modules will be available for all specialty areas as resources; however, use of NCC CE modules is optional and not required to meet certification maintenance needs under NCC's Maintenance Program.

Q When in a new maintenance cycle should the CCA be completed?

The CCA should be completed as early as possible in each new maintenance cycle, since NO CE can be earned until the Education Plan that develops from the CCA results is available to direct the amount and content of CE earned for maintenance.

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQS

Q What will happen if I don't take the CCA in time and don't have enough time to meet my continuing education requirements.

If you need additional time, then you can request an extension for a fee. Extensions must be requested online prior to the date the maintenance cycle ends. If you don't file your maintenance on time, you will have one year to reinstate for a fee.

Q If I don't earn continuing education in the required areas but have at least 50 hours, can I still maintain?

No, you have to meet both the CE hour and content category requirements as designated by the individualized Education Plan in order to complete your certification maintenance application by the maintenance cycle deadline.

Q I guess I really don't understand this. If I take the CCA and get a 7.5 specialty index in all areas, I really only have to earn 10 continuing education hours to maintain my certification?

Yes, that is correct. While the requirement is 15 continuing education hours, because you earn 5 continuing education hours for the assessment, that makes your continuing education commitment 10 continuing education hours in the certification specialty.

Q Do I have to study for the CCA? Will NCC provide study guides?

The CCA is not a pass/fail instrument. It is an assessment tool used to provide individualized feedback regarding your specialty knowledge competency strengths and gaps solely for the purpose of directing continuing education needed for maintenance of your NCC credential. NCC does not anticipate that individuals will study prior to completing the assessment and no study materials are provided. Your clinical experience and/or ongoing continuing education in support of your specialty knowledge is considered the best preparation.

Frequently Asked Questions

FAQS

Q I have been certified as a WHNP for 10 years but my practice now deals almost exclusively in gynecologic patients with a subspecialty in cancer patients? I know I won't do well in the obstetric part. I don't think it is fair to judge me on practices I don't do.

Certification is not tied to anyone's specific practice but to a standard of knowledge that all certified nurses or NPs in a specific specialty should know. Your maintenance of certification states that you have maintained your knowledge in all the areas of certification not just 1 or 2. Tomorrow, you could accept a position that is just the opposite where you exclusively see obstetric patients. NCC certification specifies that you have knowledge competencies in the areas of your certification.

Q I'm Maternal Newborn Nursing certified but my hospital requires me to float to the L&D if needed. So I take a lot L&D courses mandated by the hospital. I can use them to maintain my Maternal Newborn Nursing certification, right?

No, while individual practices may broaden or narrow within the core certification knowledge competencies, the continuing education used for your maintenance must be in your certification specialty. If you now perform significant L&D management, it may be time to consider taking the inpatient obstetric nursing exam if your practice has changed over time.

Q I'm no longer working as an inpatient obstetric nurse but I love the area and have maintained even though I don't work in it any more. I hope to return to it one day and I never want to take the certification exam again? What's going to happen to me?

NCC does not require a work requirement to maintain, but realistically, if you are not working in the area any longer, it would be conceivable that your specialty index would not be as high as someone who does and therefore, your continuing education commitments might be greater. But you still have the opportunity to maintain in the same manner as any other certified in your specialty.

Q I don't have access to a computer so will you provide a paper CCA evaluation for me?

No, the CCA is an evaluation tool housed on a secure network platform to protect the integrity of the assessment and the method of presentation. If you do not own a computer, options include short-term use of a friend or family member's computer or access via a public library or internet cafe. Any charges incurred for use of fee-for-use services will be the responsibility of the individual nurse.