Getting Ready for the NP Certification Exam

Developed and presented by:
Margaret A. Fitzgerald,
DNP, FNP-BC, NP-C, FAANP, CSP, FAAN, DCC
President
Fitzgerald Health Education Associates, Inc.
Family Nurse Practitioner
Greater Lawrence (MA) Family Health Center
Editorial Board, The Nurse Practitioner Journal,
Medscape Nursing, The Prescriber's Letter,
American Nurse Today
Member, Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee
Neighborhood Health Plan, Boston, MA

NP Certification: An Overview

In the First 15 Years of the NP Role’s Establishment

- The scope of practice expanded, matched with the increasing complexity of healthcare
In the First 15 Years of the NP Role’s Establishment (continued)

- Need to define and credential the profession
- Part of this credentialing included the establishment of the NP certification examination.

NP Certification

- Certification part of APRN licensure in nearly all of the US states
- Exceptions
  - Kansas
  - New York
  - California
  - To read more click on Dr. Fitzgerald’s Q&A at http://fhea.epubxp.com/i/180801/0

Agencies Offering NP Certification

- American Academy of Nurse Practitioners
  - Certifying body retains “Academy” designation
  - [www.aanpcertification.org](http://www.aanpcertification.org)
  - FNP, adult-gero, ANP certification
- American Nurses Credentialing Center
  - [www.nursecredentialing.org](http://www.nursecredentialing.org)
  - FNP, adult-gero primary care, ANP, GNP, PMHNP, PNP, ACNP, adult-gero acute care NP certification
Agencies Offering NP Certification (continued)

- AACN Certification Corporation
  - [www.aacn.org](http://www.aacn.org)
    - Adult Acute Care NP
- National Certification Corporation
  - [www.nccwebsite.org](http://www.nccwebsite.org)
    - WHNP, neonatal NP

---

Agencies Offering NP Certification (continued)

- Pediatric Nursing Certification Board
  - [www.pncb.org](http://www.pncb.org)
    - Primary care PNP, acute care PNP

---

How do the certifying organizations describe certification and the NP certification examination?

- Per the ANCC
  - “Certification is the process by which a nongovernmental agency or an association grants recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications.”
How do the certifying organizations describe certification and the NP certification examination? (continued)

• “Certification can be used for entry into practice, validation of competence, recognition of excellence, and/or for regulation. It can be mandatory or voluntary.”

• “Certification validates an individual’s knowledge, skills, and abilities in a defined role and clinical area of practice, based on pre-determined standards.”


• “The Nurse Practitioner (NP) certification examination tests the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for entry into advanced practice.”

How do the certifying organizations describe certification and the NP certification examination? (continued)

• According to the NCSBN, the NP certification programs provide a legally defensible examination suitable for the regulation of advanced practice nurses.

Question Style

• Most often, four option test items
  - A stem (question itself) and four possible choices or options
    • Exception- NCC for WHNP=3 options
  • No penalty for incorrect items
    - An incorrect answer is point or value neutral.

Question Style (continued)

• Other styles
  - Chose all that are correct, more than 1 answer correct.
  - Correctly identify an image, ECG tracing, others
Test Availability

• Computer-based
  - Year-round or nearly so
  • Multiple test sites across the country
• Paper and pencil option
  - WHNP only, one day per year

Availability of Results

• For computer-based exams
  - Results provided, pass or fail, at end of the examination

Comparison of Exams

• Recognition for NP licensure
  - All aforementioned exams
• Credential
  - AANP example- NP-C, can add letter to designate area of certification, such as FNP-C, AGNP-C, ANP-C
  - PNCB example- CPNP-PC, CPNP-AC
  - NCC example- WHNP-BC
What is common to all NP examinations?

- No matter what patient population
  - Family (entire lifespan), adult (≥13 y), gerontology, adult-gero, women’s health, pediatric (up to age 22 years)
- Practice setting
  - Primary care (ANP, FNP, AGNP, PNP, WHNP), acute care (ACNP, AGACNP)

(continued)

- Anatomy, physiology, pathophysiology, pharmacology
  - Mechanism of disease, how drug therapies modify disease

(continued)

- Health promotion and disease prevention
  - Principles of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention
What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Obtaining the health history
  - Interview techniques, analyzing content of subjective information

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Evaluation of signs and symptoms
  - Symptom analysis, developing working diagnosis

• Physical examination
  - Knowledge of normal, abnormal finding, synthesizing findings with health history to hone diagnosis

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Laboratory, diagnostic testing
  - Ordering or performing tests to help support diagnosis and/or contribute to the treatment plan
What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Evidence-based practice (EBP)
  - Developing the plan of care based on supporting scientific evidence and clinical guidelines

• All Fitzgerald Health review courses are based on the latest in evidence-based practice and exam blueprints.

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Legal and ethical issues*
  - Malpractice, confidentiality (HIPPA), patient advocacy and competency

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• For more information on malpractice, see Avoiding Malpractice in the FHEA newsletter:
  http://fhea.epubxp.com/i/180801/0
What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Community resources
  - Recognizing and utilizing community resources to aid in care of patient and family

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Cultural competence
  - Incorporating commonly encountered cultural beliefs and practices

• Principles of epidemiology
  - Considering sensitivity, specificity of diagnostics, prevalence, incidence, others

What is common to all NP examinations? (continued)

• Healthcare economics
  - Providing cost-effective care, Medicare, Medicaid, private insurances, nation healthcare financing issues

• Healthcare management
  - APRN as a healthcare leader
What are the differences in the NP certification examinations?

• ANCC exams
  - When compared to other agencies, generally higher percent focused on professional issues, healthcare policy, etc.
  - Example- ~25% of family, adult-gerontology exams
    • Check with ANCC website for specifics.

What are the differences in the NP certification examinations? (continued)

• Other certifying bodies
  - Section on professional issues either not found as a special section (AANP) or small amount (WHNP=2%)

Healthcare policy, leadership, ethnic and ethical considerations in healthcare are covered in the Fitzgerald Health Review courses.
Exams Retiring Soon
(by end 2015)

• Acute Care Nurse Practitioner
  - ANCC
• Adult Nurse Practitioner
  - ANCC and AANP
• Gerontological NP
  - ANCC and AANP
• Adult Psychiatric/Mental Health NP
  - ANCC

What happens if you hold or will hold one of these certifications?

• Keep certification current!
  • Check to make sure you meet application deadlines.
  – If your certification lapses, you may not be able to renew your existing certification or your license to practice.
• Your credential is NOT retiring!

Passing Score on NP Boards: Examples for Current Exams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANCC</th>
<th>AANP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>=&gt;350/500</td>
<td>=&gt;500/800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Fitzgerald Health Education Associates, Inc.
### Typical Percentage of Examinees Who Pass the Examination

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ANCC</th>
<th>AANP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Typically,</td>
<td>~85% Translates to a score of 350</td>
<td>~85% Translates to score of 500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(minimum passing score)</td>
<td>(minimum passing score)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>=~15th% tile</td>
<td>=~15th% tile</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Fitzgerald Health Education Associates, Inc.

### Procedure if Failure: Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ANCC</th>
<th>AANP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Apply to retest after 60 days</td>
<td>Apply to retest, 15 h CE prior to retesting, no more than two times in a calendar year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Fitzgerald Health Education Associates, Inc.

### Recertification Every 5 Years: Examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>ANCC</th>
<th>AANP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Practice hours plus CE hours and select professional activities</td>
<td>Practice hours plus CE hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

© Fitzgerald Health Education Associates, Inc.
True or false?

• On the national NP certification exam, you should expect to find specific questions on your state’s APRN practice act.

True or false?

• You plan to sit for the certification exam in a state where NPs have limited substance prescribing authority. As a result, your certification exam will not contain questions about prescribing opioids.

True or false?

• Once an NP has achieved nationally recognized certification from a state and nationally recognized certification agency, this person can now practice as a nurse practitioner.
With all certification examinations, keep in mind the following.

Entry-level NP practice
Nationally and internationally recognized standards of care and clinical guidelines, evidence-based practice (EBP)

Evidence-based practice (EBP) defined: The delivery of individualized healthcare on the basis of an awareness of the impact and strength of related scientific evidence*
Examples
- CDC for immunizations
- NAEPP EPR-3 for asthma
- ADA for DM
- AAP for pediatric primary care


The broad stroke of practice, not the mix you see in a typical clinical day.
Common diseases occur commonly, not an examination of the esoteric.

As much thyroid as DM
As much male GU as female GYN
Most nursing practice at the RN level is one of exceptions rather than rules.
The NP certification examination tests your ability to know...

• **Why** a patient is at risk for a problem.
• **How** a clinical problem has developed.
• **What** is the most likely clinical presentation of the condition?

• **Why** a given intervention is effective.
• **How** that intervention works.
• **What** is the most likely clinical outcome?
• Why this clinical problem is of significance to the overall healthcare system.
• How this problem can be approached from both a macro and micro healthcare viewpoint.

Therefore...
• A poor approach to preparing for the exam and practice is to...
  - Memorize information so you know what to do but not why you are doing it, in both the exam room and as part of the larger healthcare system.
Therefore...

• A better approach to preparing for the exam and practice is to...
  – Understand concepts and apply knowledge so you know what to do and why you are doing it at both the micro (exam room) and macro (public) healthcare level.

Focus Your Study

• The material from your certifying body that is sent via mail or available on the agency’s website
  – Outlines exam content in detail
  – At the same time, you will not be tested on every topic area listed.

Focus Your Study...

• Be well-prepared to exercise the full scope of NP skills.
  – Clinician, full scope of practice healthcare provider, who refers as appropriate but not routinely, healthcare leader
Focus Your Study on...

Subjective
- History-taking skills
  - When to use open- and closed-ended questions, interviewing techniques that demonstrate cultural competency

Focus Your Study on...

Subjective (cont.)
- Symptom analysis
  - One of the most helpful clinical tool in NP practice

Focus Your Study on...

Objective
- Normal PE findings
  - Including age-appropriate examination findings in the child (FNP) and elder (AGNP, GNP, ANP, FNP)
Focus Your Study on...

• Objective (cont.)
  – Abnormal PE findings
  • For commonly encountered health problems in primary care

Focus Your Study on...

• Assessment
  – Differential diagnosis
    • Defined- The process of determining which of $\geq 2$ conditions or diseases with similar symptoms is the one from which the patient most likely has, by a systematic analysis, comparison and contrasting of the clinical findings

Focus Your Study on...

• Plan
  – Broad strokes of intervention
    • Drug classes rather than specific products
      – ACEI (-pril)-Lisinopril vs. trandolapril
      – Fluoroquinolones (-floxacin)-Ciprofloxacin vs. moxifloxacin
      – Beta2-adrenergic agonist (-terol)-Albuterol vs. salmeterol
      – Progestins (-gestrel)-Levonorgestrel vs. desogestrel
• Across drug classes and lifespan
  - Pharmacodynamics (PD, what the drug does to the body and/or disease) does not differ but pharmacokinetics (PK, what the body does to the drug including absorption, distribution, biotransformation {metabolism}, and elimination) does differ.

• Across drug classes (cont.)
  - Major drug adverse effects tend to be found consistently across a given drug class and are often consistent with the drug’s mechanism of action.

Focus Your Study on...
• Safety issues in medication use
  - Who should take a given med (often using EBP standards), who should not (typically safety issues)
  - Consideration in special groups
    • Elders
    • Pregnancy and lactation
    • Infants and children
Information on exam...

- At least 6 months old!
- “Hot off the press” issues not likely included

Additional Resources

- Frequently asked questions, study recommendations and sample exam questions to aid in preparing for certification including archives of Margaret Fitzgerald’s certification issues articles

Additional Resources (continued)

- Archived FHEA electronic newsletters at fhea.com
  - Timely information on pharmacology
  - Clinical issues of interest to advanced practice nurses
  - Archived PDFs available free of charge at www.fhea.com/ezine_archive.shtml.
Questions?

End of Presentation
Thank you for your time and attention.
Margaret A. Fitzgerald,
DNP, FNP-BC, NP-C, FAANP, CSP, FAAN, DCC
Website: www.fhea.com  email: cs@fhea.com