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Preparing for CNE Certification: A Journey to Excellence

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During the past year, several faculty members at Western Kentucky University have prepared for and obtained the Certified Nurse Educator (CNE) credential. The purpose of this article is to discuss the value and goals of the certification process. In addition, we hope to provide suggestions for preparing for the CNE exam and highlight how the CNE certification process strengthened our practice as educators.

Nurse educators strive to advance the profession through preparation of future generations of nurses. Previously, academic nurse educators were not designated within the advanced practice arena as professionals requiring expertise with a distinctive knowledge base and skill set. Today, we are more adequately recognized for our competence in nursing skills, as well as in facilitating student learning and socialization, assessment and evaluation of learning, use of educational theory, and the design and evaluation of curriculum (Billings & Halstead, 2009). Clinical expertise, innovative teaching and learning methods, scholarship and public service demonstrate our qualities as true professionals. In 2005, the National League for Nursing (NLN) recognized the need for certifying Academic Nurse Educators to distinguish them in the field of nursing. According to the NLN (n.d.), the goals of certification include:

- Distinguish academic nursing education as a specialty area of practice and an advanced practice role within professional nursing
- Recognize the academic nurse educator's specialized knowledge, skills, and abilities and excellence in practice
- Strengthen the use of core competencies of nurse educator practice
- Contribute to nurse educators' professional development (¶ 3).

For each of us, the certification process became a quest for excellence and the discovery of ways to renew our commitment to the field of nursing education. We soon discovered that preparing for the certification exam was a process, so we each adopted strategies and techniques to facilitate the review of material included on the NLN CNE test blueprint (NLN, 2005).

Our first step included reading the *Certified Nurse Educator Handbook*. This can be downloaded from the NLN website at no charge. Topics in the handbook included application deadlines, test dates, eligibility requirements, sample questions, and much more. Next, we developed our own personal plan for accomplishing this ambitious goal. If one is highly motivated to study independently and schedules ample time to review the material, s/he may choose not to attend a preparation workshop. Accessibility of a prep-course and expenses are factors to consider when determining if such a course is feasible. Two of us decided to participate in a review course

and the other did not. More information about preparation courses can be found at www.nln.org/facultydevelopment/index.htm.

We each purchased the online Self Assessment Exam (SAE) offered by the NLN. This was one way to evaluate our strengths and weaknesses based on the CNE test blueprint. It also provided an opportunity to practice test-taking online, as opposed to a pencil/paper format. After taking the SAE, we each developed an individualized study plan that helped focus our studies. The NLN provided an extensive suggested reading list. Authors listed below were among a few of our favorites:

Billings, D. M., & Halstead, J. A. (2005). *Teaching in nursing: A guide for faculty* (2nd ed.). St. Louis, MO: Elsevier Saunders.

Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

Grossman, S., Valiga, T. (2000). *The new leadership challenge: Creating the future of nursing*. Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Co.

McDonald, M. E. (2002). *Systematic assessment of learning outcomes: Developing multiple-choice exams*. Sudbury, MA: Jones and Bartlett Publishers.

The CNE exam consisted of 150 multiple-choice questions with a three hour time limit. Of the 150 test items, 130 counted toward the final scoring of the exam, with 20 being further evaluated for validity and reliability (NLN, n.d.). The on-line CNE exam was user-friendly in the fact that backtracking to previous questions was permitted. One question was presented on the screen at a time, and the test-taker was allowed to flag the difficult questions and return to them later. Bathroom breaks were allowed as often as necessary, but the time continued to elapse. We found it beneficial to pace ourselves and assure that at least fifty questions had been answered each hour. Results were immediately available following the exam with feedback provided. Certification is valid for five years, at which time the educator will provide documentation of professional development, or otherwise retest for continued entitlement to the CNE credential. There are over 120 testing centers all over the nation and test dates are available year round. Lexington and Louisville are the two testing locations in Kentucky. For specific details about times and dates, visit the National League for Nursing website at www.nln.org and click on "Certification for Nurse Educators."

After preparing for and successfully obtaining the CNE designation, we reflected on how this experience affected our work as Academic Nurse Educators. We found that working to obtain certification and the process of studying for the exam influenced our practice in several ways. First of all, it was beneficial to review the educational theories after teaching for several years. It brought back the basics of "why" we do the things we do and reminded us that common teaching and learning principles are guided by deeper philosophies of pedagogy. Secondly, it was helpful to revisit the meanings behind statistical results from

multiple choice exams. We tend to perceive things from an experienced nurse's point of view and believe our test questions measure student learning, when in fact, the item-analysis data could reveal otherwise. Thirdly, we gained new insights into leadership theories that guide our role in the classroom as well as on various departmental, college, and university committees. Finally, this journey reminded us of the multiple facets of scholarship that are an integral part of being a nurse educator.

We recommend that nursing faculty take advantage of the opportunity to obtain this distinctive credential. As noted by the NLN, "Certification in any field is a mark of professionalism. For academic nurse educators, it establishes nursing education as a specialty area of practice and creates a means for faculty to demonstrate their expertise in this role" (NLN, n.d., ¶ 1). Becoming certified as a nurse educator benefits faculty and their schools of nursing; but most importantly, it benefits students who look to us for understanding of content, guidance toward career goals, and inspiration for a successful future in this highly respected and historical profession.

References

Billings, D. M., & Halstead, J. A. (2005). *Teaching in nursing: A guide for faculty* (2nd ed.). St. Louis, MO: Elsevier Saunders.

Boyer, E. (1990). *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton, NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

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