

# Gerontological Nurse Certification Review

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*This book is dedicated to Mathy Mezey, PhD, RN, FAAN, professor of nursing education at New York University College of Nursing and director of The John A. Hartford Foundation Institute for Geriatric Nursing, for her lifelong love and passion for geriatric nursing excellence and her consistent recognition of certification as the benchmark for excellence in geriatric nursing care.*

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# Foreword

For several decades, policy experts and healthcare professionals have made projections regarding the coming baby boomer bubble of an aging American population. The recent Institute of Medicine report, *Retooling for an Aging America: Building the Health Care Workforce*, details the dramatic changes in the size and composition of the aging American population and the challenges this will create for health professionals of all kinds. Those projections have come to fruition, creating an urgent need for health care professionals and nurses in particular to have a strong base of knowledge and skills in care of the older adult. Demographic realities will create a doubling of adults over the age of 65 in the very near term, adding to the rapidly increasing number of individuals in this country who are termed the oldest old. Amazingly, Hallmark Cards reports that annually it sells over 85,000 cards for centenarian birthdays.

The aging of America has created a dynamic and changing perspective on aging. Older adults are living longer while maintaining active and full employment, social, and community lives. However, this longevity is accompanied by a concurrent increase in chronic illnesses treated with sophisticated technological and pharmacological interventions. This enormously complex array of treatments creates the need for a health professional workforce that is prepared to meet the unique physiological and psychosocial needs of older adults. The unique skill sets that are required to provide safe, high quality and effective care to older adults are not intuitively acquired, but rather come only from a focused approach to developing new views and knowledge that will shape and define how care will be delivered to the older adult.

Unfortunately, despite the growth in the population of older adults, the nursing profession has not seen a concomitant increase in the proportion of the nursing workforce with a specialization in geriatrics. However, increasingly nurses and other professionals are seeking the specific skill sets necessary to deliver high quality care to older adults. Much of the enhanced focus on geriatrics comes as a result of the important and substantial support that has been made available to the nursing profession by the John A. Hartford Foundation. Through this support, an enhanced focus on both geriatric practice and research has blossomed in the profession and nursing professionals have increasingly sought the specific knowledge and skills necessary. As they seek this knowledge, they also seek the professional validation represented by certification by a national body as a specialized geriatric clinician. Certification is an external validation of competence to meet specific and important needs is the hallmark of excellence in nursing practice.

This new publication is an important addition to the resources available for nurses who seek certification as a geriatric clinician. This resource, designed for the generalist baccalaureate-educated nursing clinician who desires validation of expert knowledge and skills for care of the older adult, also recognizes the reality of practice. Generalist practice is almost uniformly geriatric practice. The preponderance of older adults in today's acute care facilities, long-term care settings, and communities should create an awareness among all nursing professionals that the knowledge and skills assessed through geriatric certification are a basic foundation for safe practice today.

In this book, the tools and clear presentation of information related to the actual testing process provide the learner with a framework for confidence as he or she prepares for the exam. More important, however, is the elaborate presentation of the certification content and the attention to the important physical and psychosocial elements of the human aging process.

The American Nurses Association Scope and Standards of Practice Statement expresses clearly the central role nurses play in protecting and assuring that safe and effective care is delivered. This statement notes: "Today as in the past, nursing remains pivotal in improving the health status of the public and ensuring safe, effective, quality care." This mandate for nursing to engage in safe, effective, high-quality care cannot be met for older adults absent a strong base of knowledge regarding the unique needs of this population. As nurses strive to engage in this level of practice, certification will validate our commitment to providing the best care possible. This book will enable nursing professionals to acquire certification as a geriatric specialist and provide them with the ability to achieve this important and professionally responsible goal.

Geraldine Bednash, PhD, RN, FAAN  
Executive Director  
American Association of Colleges of Nursing

# Preface

The *Gerontological Nurse Certification Review* has been written as a reference and certification test review guide for registered nurses (RNs) preparing for gerontological certification. It is also a useful text for students who are studying gerontology, teachers preparing gerontology classes, and RNs working with older adults. The book presents information about preparing for the certification exam, a comprehensive compilation of content specific to gerontology, and a test bank of questions specifically developed for the RN preparing for certification in gerontology.

The book provides necessary step-by-step information for the candidate for certification to prepare and take the test in chapters 1 and 2. The remaining chapters 3 through 13 are organized according to the various topics of the blueprint of the Gerontological Nurse Certification Exam for baccalaureate and associate degree nurses. Chapter 3 focuses on topics specific to the aging population such as demographics, myths about aging, theories of aging and nursing, communication skills geared for the older adult, teaching-learning principles that work well with older adults, and the history of gerontological nursing. Chapter 4 describes the normal aging changes and questions referring to history and physical exam of older adults. Chapter 5 identifies the health promotion needs of elders such as nutrition, exercise, primary and secondary prevention strategies, and alternative and complementary health care practices used with older adults. Chapter 6 describes the environment, including safety and security, relocation, transportation, the importance of space, community-based resources, and residential facilities. Spirituality and dying are discussed in chapter 7 with regard to advanced directives, hospice and palliative care, and the grieving process. Chapter 8 describes the acute and chronic physical illnesses most frequently experienced by older adults. Chapter 9 discusses the cognitive and psychological disorders experienced by elders, including dementia, delirium, and depression. Common medications used by older adults along with discussions about polypharmacy, issues related to pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics, noncompliance, and adverse drug effects are covered in chapter 10. Special topics such as pain, sexuality, and elder neglect and abuse are discussed in chapter 11. Descriptions of health policy issues and organizations that advocate for older adults are covered in chapter 12. Finally, chapter 13 discusses the scope and standards of geriatric nursing practice relating to leadership and management, research, ethical and legal issues, and professional competency.

A posttest contains 514 test questions and correct answers covering all the various content areas. Readers can choose to take the comprehensive integrated test under simulated timed conditions or select parts of the test bank to take at different times scheduled for the convenience of the individual.

The importance of practicing psychomotor skills, communicating with others, and increasing experience with various competencies such as leading, delegating, organizing, and assessing is clear. Thus, practicing reading scenario questions and answering them is considered very important in achieving success with an exam. Research indicates that the more practice an individual has taking questions similar to the exam they are preparing for, the higher success rate they will achieve (Bonis, Taft, & Wendler, 2007; Griffiths, Papastrat, Czekanski, & Hagan, 2004). Moreover, with the increasing elderly population, exam success is essential to the availability of a nursing workforce educated in assessing and meeting the needs of older adults. The authors hope that all nurses who complete this preparation book will be able to gain valuable knowledge, validate their competency on the certification test, and improve their ability to deliver high quality care to older adults.

## References

- Bonis, S., Taft, L., & Wendler, M. (2007). Strategies to promote success of the NCLEX-RN. *Nursing Education Perspectives, 28*(2), 82–87.
- Griffiths, M. J., Papastrat, K., Czekanski, K., & Hagan, K. (2004). The lived experience of NCLEX failure. *Journal of Nursing Education, 43*(7), 322–325.

# Information for Taking the Certification Exam

1

The *Gerontological Nurse Certification Review* prepares registered nurses (RNs) to take the national Gerontological Nurse exam offered by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC). By obtaining gerontological certification, nurses gain power similar to board-certified physicians and advanced practice nurses. There is an incentive to become certified in one's area of expertise. Most institutions will apply certification toward promotion to the next staff level. Some institutions give a bonus or a differential pay raise for certification. If you are affiliated with a Magnet hospital that supports certification for professional development, you will be further recognized. Most importantly, certification is an excellent way to be recognized for expertise in a specialty area. It is highly likely your institution will reimburse you for the fee required to obtain certification status.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain:

- The ANCC testing format
- The application and scheduling of the test date for certification in gerontology
- General hints to improve your preparation for the exam

## Certification Exam Format

The ANCC only offers a computer-based test in multiple-choice format with the option of choosing one of four possible answers. The test contains 150 questions and covers content knowledge and application of professional nursing regarding gerontology at an entry-level competency. The exam is developed from information from role delineation studies that measure the necessary knowledge and skills needed for competent practice in a specialty area such as gerontology (Stromberg et al., 2005). The purpose of the exam is to assess whether nurses are competent to assess the strengths of older adults in order to facilitate their highest quality of life and, when appropriate, a “good death.” The ANCC updates the RN gerontology certification exam on a regular basis. A 75-question Practice Certification Examination and answers can be accessed at <http://www.anfonline.org/ANF/geroexam.pdf>. Completing the practice exam and reviewing your answers is strongly recommended.

Table 1.1 lists the 10 exam topic areas, the corresponding number of questions that are asked about each area, and the percentage of the test that correlates with each content.

## Detailed Test Content Outline

This book is organized chapter by chapter according to the ANCC RN Gerontology Test Content Outline, which can be seen in detail at [http://www.nursecredentialing.org/cert/TCOs/09Gero\\_TCO.html](http://www.nursecredentialing.org/cert/TCOs/09Gero_TCO.html).

### 1.1 ANCC Domains of Practice

Topic area	Percentage of the exam	Number of questions
Aging as it relates to older adults	2%	3
Health issues	30%	45
Communication	8.67%	13
Nursing process	16%	24
Lifestyle, health changes, and vulnerability in older adults	16.67%	25
Education	3.33%	5
Health promotion and wellness	10%	15
Management/leadership	7.33%	11
Legal and ethical issues	4.67%	7
Research	1.33%	2

*Note.* Adapted from the ANCC Gerontology Certification Exam Content Outline, June 4, 2007, [http://www.nursecredentialing.org/cert/TCOs/09Gero\\_TCO.html](http://www.nursecredentialing.org/cert/TCOs/09Gero_TCO.html)

## Total Number of Questions

There are 175 questions on the test, but 25 of them are pilot questions and do not count toward one's score. There is no way to determine which of the 175 questions count for your test, so it is best to consider each question as carefully as you can. This is the standard approach for validating new questions and ensuring that they are reliable.

## Total Time

The time allowed to take the test is 3.5 hours. If desired, test takers can take a 20-minute practice exam to become oriented to the computer system. This is highly recommended for all test takers. This tutorial can be reviewed by going to the ANCC Web site at <http://www.anfonline.org/ANF/geroexam.pdf>. Most people complete the exam in about 2.5 hours, but ANCC allows 3.5 hours to take the exam.

## Obtaining the Application

### Eligibility to Take the Exam

To take the certification exam, you must provide payment (see the ANCC Web site for details about the cost), a copy of your current unrestricted RN license, documentation that you have practiced full time as an RN the equivalent of 2 years, have a minimum of 2,000 hours of clinical practice in gerontology in the last 3 years, and the completed application. You must also provide documentation of 30 continuing education hours in the gerontology specialty that you have acquired in the last 3 years. In case you are ever audited, it is recommended that you maintain a file of your continuing education certificates. The application will request that you include a description of the continuing education course and how it is relevant to your geriatric practice if the title does not reflect gerontology clearly.

A *General Testing and Renewal Handbook* with testing information and an application can be accessed at <http://www.nursecredentialing.org/cert/PDFs/examhandbook.pdf> (American Nurses Credentialing Center, 2008). You can type directly onto the application and print it. The address to send the application is:

American Nurses Credentialing Center  
PO Box 791333  
Baltimore, MD 21279-1333

If you have any questions regarding the application, you can send an e-mail to [certification@ana.org](mailto:certification@ana.org) or call 1-800-284-2378 for further clarification of any information.

## Scheduling the Test

The test is administered by Thomson Prometric Computer Testing Centers. To choose a location, first set up a date and time to take the computerized

test on Prometric's Web site: <http://securereg3.prometric.com>. An authorization to test (ATT) will be mailed to you from the testing center. After you receive the ATT, call 1-800-350-7076 or visit <http://www.2test.com> and make an appointment during the 90-day eligibility time period stated on your ATT form.

Testing centers are located in every state and some sites in Canada, Puerto Rico, and Guam. You can schedule, reschedule, or cancel your appointment at the Prometric Web site, <http://www.2test.com>. Hours for testing are generally 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., and the testing center is open Monday through Friday. It is recommended that you schedule your test appointment as soon as you get your ATT in order to have the best opportunity of getting your desired day and time. If you decide to switch the date, time, or test site location, you need to follow the directions in the ANCC General Testing and Renewal Handbook located at <http://www.nursecredentialing.org/cert/PDFs/ExamHandbook.pdf>.

## What to Bring on the Day of the Exam

You need to bring your ATT form and two forms of identification that match the name on your ATT. One form of ID must have your photo, and both forms must have your signature. One form must be your passport, a photo driver's license, or a photo government-issued ID card. You will not be admitted without the necessary forms of identification. You cannot take anything into the testing room. You will be provided with scratch paper and a pencil only. You will be given a locker to store your valuables, such as car keys and wallet.

## Time of Arrival

Test takers *must* arrive 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled time. Failure to arrive early will cost you your appointment and require you to reapply.

## During the Exam

There are no refreshment breaks. You can take a restroom break according to the instructions given at the testing center, but this time will be subtracted from your total time of 3.5 hours. You cannot ask any questions during the exam. When you complete the test, you cannot take the scratch paper from the testing room.

## Receiving Test Results

All scores for the test are reported in the mail approximately 2 weeks after taking the test. The results will be in a standardized format with a pass or fail designation. Those who fail the exam will receive a diagnostic explanation for each of the content areas.

## Receiving Certificate and Pin

Those who pass the exam receive a certificate, pin, and identification card that states ANCC certification. This certification is valid for 5 years. Information regarding recertification is available at <http://www.nursecredentialing.org>.

## Hints for the Certification Exam

- There is no penalty for guessing, so it is recommended that test takers answer every question.
- The test covers general and frequently seen gerontological problems, not rare and exotic diseases.
- Be familiar with the common drugs used with older adults.
- Know the frequently occurring adverse drug events with older adults and be able to apply the Modified Beers Criteria.
- You should know the normal laboratory results for the diseases that older adults commonly experience.

References that are recommended by the ANCC regarding gerontology are available at <http://www.nursecredentialing.org> or by calling 1-800-284-2378.

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- American Nurses Credentialing Center. (2008a). *2008 General testing and renewal handbook*. Retrieved April 23, 2008, from <http://www.nursecredentialing.org/cert/PDFs/examhandbook.pdf>
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