



FOUR STEPS TO CONTINUING COMPETENCY

NCC Core Maintenance Program

STEP



Current Licensure

STEP



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

STEP



Obtain an Education Plan

STEP



Earn and Document CE
based on Your Individualized
Education Plan

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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 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  **one**

Current Licensure

Hold a valid, current unrestricted nursing license

STEP  **two**

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, at the beginning of each new maintenance cycle.

STEP  **three**

Obtain an Education Plan

Based on the CCA results, an individualized education plan will be developed. This individualized 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 posted to the individual's NCC website profile under "education plans". The plan is also recorded in their online maintenance application. This plan is interactive, within the maintenance application, meaning it shows how entered CE meets required CE hours for tracking progress. A description of how the specialty index report is generated and transitions to the individualized education plan can be found on page 8.

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 CE and pretest CE are not audited since NCC provides the CE certificates and has the course descriptions. *Only CE earned from outside sources are subject to random audit.*

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

Current Subspecialty Certification

- Care of the Extremely Low Birth Weight Neonate (C-ELBW)
- Electronic Fetal Monitoring (C-EFM®)
- Neonatal Neuro-Intensive Care (C-NNIC)
- Neonatal Pediatric Transport (C-NPT®)

- Obstetric Emergencies (C-OBE)
- Reproductive Health and Infertility (C-RHI)

COMING SOON

Discontinued/Retired Core and Subspecialty 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
- Breastfeeding
- Menopause Clinician and Educator
- Obstetrics for the Primary Care Nurse Practitioner
- Reproductive Gynecologic Health

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 certification.

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 major specialty areas (See Pages 9-10 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](https://www.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; individuals should complete the assessment at the start of each new maintenance cycle since **NO CE that is earned prior to taking the assessment can be used for maintenance.** 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 an individualized education plan that outlines what CE needs to be earned during the new 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 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.

For details of each content area, review the booklet
“CCA Education Plan Examples”

Core Certification Specialty Knowledge Competencies

Inpatient Antepartum Nursing

Maternal and Fetal Physiology and Assessment - 15 hours

Obstetric and Medical Complications in Pregnancy - 25 hours

Pharmacology - 5 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Inpatient Obstetric Nursing

Fetal Assessment - 10 hours

Labor and Birth - 15 hours

Pregnancy and Obstetric Complications - 10 hours

Postpartum - 5 hours

Newborn - 5 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Low Risk Neonatal Intensive Care Nursing

Mother/Fetus - 5 hours

Physical Assessment and General Management - 15 hours

**Assessment and Management of Pathophysiological Conditions
and Neonatal Complications** - 20 hours

Pharmacology, Pharmacokinetics and Pharmacodynamics - 5 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

For details of each content area, review the booklet
“CCA Education Plan Examples”

Core Certification Specialty Knowledge Competencies

Maternal Newborn Nursing

Pregnancy, Birth Risk Factors and Complications - 5 hours

Postpartum Assessment, Management and Complications - 20 hours

Newborn Assessment, Management and Complications - 20 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Neonatal Intensive Care Nursing

General Assessment and Management - 15 hours

Physiology and Pathophysiology - 20 hours

Pharmacology, Pharmacokinetics and Pharmacodynamics - 10 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Neonatal Nurse Practitioner

General / Physical Assessment - 5 hours

Embryology, Physiology, Pathophysiology and Systems Management - 20 hours

General Management - 10 hours

Pharmacology - 10 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Women’s Health Care Nurse Practitioner

Normal Physiology and Wellness Management - 10 hours

**Gynecology Disorders, Obstetrical Complications
and Primary Care Management** - 20 hours

Assessment, Diagnostic Testing & Interpretation - 5 hours

Pharmacology - 10 hours

Professional Practice - 5 hours

Other Recognized Activities and Baseline Hours

Some outside activities are recognized by NCC and can be used for baseline hours.

These activities have to be outside your expected employment responsibilities and can only be used to meet baseline requirements. **Baseline hours can be in any core area for your certification.**

The activities described can only be used to meet baseline CE needs within the education plan. 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 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.

Use of **15 hours of NCC CE**, lowers the fee to **\$80**

Use of **30 hours of NCC CE**, lowers the fee to **\$70**

Use of **45 hours of NCC CE**, 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 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

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 individualized 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

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 certification. 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

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.