

SRNA Briefing Overview - NCLEX-RN Exam results in Canada

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Background

In early 2012, the registered nurse regulatory bodies in Canada (except in Quebec) announced their intention to adopt a new licensure examination (the NCLEX-RN) for Canadian nurses through National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) in the United States. Contracts were signed in the spring of 2012.

This new exam replaces the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination (CRNE).

The rationale for the change to the NCLEX-RN included: applicant demand for greater access to the exam; faster issuing of results; more secure than a paper-based exam; psychometrically sound and legally defensible exam; it tested the competencies for registered nurse practice.

Of the 549 Saskatchewan graduates who wrote the NCLEX-RN during 2015, 79.4% ultimately were successful in passing the exam. There was an initial drop in the pass rate on the first attempt of the new exam in early 2015.

As writers gain confidence and become familiar with the exam's new format, the SRNA expects to see more writers passing on their first attempt. Of those who had not yet been successful by the end of the year, many were planning to write the exam again in 2016.

The role of the regulator is to protect the public by ensuring applicants are ready to become licensed and practise safely. One aspect of this process is the requirement for applicants to successfully pass the entry to practice exam. As the regulator, the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association (SRNA) is accountable for selecting and overseeing the delivery of the exam for those graduates seeking licensure in the province. We are confident that the NCLEX-RN is a fair and reliable tool for assessing Saskatchewan nursing graduate skills.

SRNA's Position

- SRNA knows Saskatchewan has strong nursing education programs, and continues to work with the educational institutions and nursing students to ensure best preparation for the NCLEX-RN examination. The SRNA will work with the educational institutions and program advisory committee to help address any gaps to support students.
- Nursing graduates must pass an entry-to-practice exam set by the provincial or territorial regulatory body to be licensed to practice and enter the profession in Canada.
- SRNA offers information on its website, as well as an opportunity for students to connect with an Exams Representative at SRNA. SRNA also offers presentations and follows up directly with anyone who may need to rewrite, linking them with the resources available.
- Canadian registered nurses have been, and continue to be, involved in reviewing the exam's contents. This is to ensure that questions do not contain language or references that would impede the success of Canadian writers.
- As a nursing regulator, one of our roles is to ensure that nurses have the knowledge, skill and judgment needed to provide safe care at the beginning of their careers. We are confident that the NCLEX-RN is a reliable and fair tool for assessing Saskatchewan graduates' competence and supporting patient safety at new nurses' point-of-entry into the profession.
- The SRNA is confident about the exam's strength and the relationships we have with the nursing schools. The nursing education programs are approved by SRNA and have high success rates and students find jobs very quickly. We have confidence in our nursing schools' ability to educate students who are able to function safely and competently.
- Nursing education in Canada is renowned internationally for its high quality, and we have been working hard to prepare our students and we are committed to excellence in nursing education.
- The NCLEX-RN is but one requirement the SRNA uses to determine eligibility for registered nurse licensure in Saskatchewan. Additional requirements for licensure including: graduation from an approved nursing education program; of good character; and fluency in English language.

Release of 2015 NCLEX-RN Results

What are the results of the Saskatchewan graduates for the first year of the NCLEX-RN?

In 2015, 79.4% of 549 Saskatchewan graduates were ultimately successful in passing the NCLEX-RN exam. As writers gain confidence and become familiar with the exam's new format, the SRNA expects to see more writers passing on their first attempt. Of those who had not yet been successful by the end of the year, many were planning to write the exam again in 2016.

What is an ultimate pass rate?

The ultimate pass rate (UPR) is a percentage of how many exam writers eventually passed the exam in a given year. It does not take into consideration how often a writer had to write the exam before passing or if they have attempts remaining on the exam. Only graduates from a Canadian RN education program who have applied for licensure in Canada (approximately 96% of all graduates) are included in the calculation of the UPR.

Why does it matter?

These numbers are helpful when looking at health human resource planning. It will tell how many exam writers will now be available to work once they receive their licenses/registration with the licensing body.

Why are the results different from reports on first time, or second time, writes?

The UPR gives a different look at the full picture of the data about exam writers. For example, a report on success of first time writers will be useful for education programs to determine how well students performed on their first attempt after graduation. After that first attempt, if the writer is not successful, you could surmise that he/she might prepare for the exam differently, use additional resources for comparing to the test's blueprint, or has a better understanding of how a computer adaptive test (CAT) works. The UPR isn't a specifically helpful link to information for educators.

What is the policy for those needing to rewrite the NCLEX-RN?

In Saskatchewan, writers can attempt the NCLEX-RN three times. This is consistent with the number of attempts applicants were able to make on the previous exam.

Writers that fail the exam, and believe that extenuating circumstances contributed to this outcome, should contact the SRNA to discuss their concerns.

What happens to those that write and fail the NCLEX-RN exam?

Those who are not successful on the NCLEX-RN are sent a Candidate's Performance Report (CPR) from the administrator of the exam, "Pearson Vue". This document provides information about how they did in each content section of the exam, indicating whether they performed above, near or below the passing standard. More information about interpreting the CPR can be found on [National Council of State Boards of Nursing website](#).

What additional support may be available to students?

Writers should continue to review information, such as the test plan details, found on the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) website.

The nursing education programs may also offer additional exam preparation support such as workshops or review material, offer tutorials for lab values, or map out curriculum against the plan for NCLEX-RN to see if there are any gaps within the curriculum and to make sure the areas are covered.

Strategies for Success/Go Forward Plan

What changes can Canadian educators make to help with preparation for the NCLEX-RN?

Schools of Nursing and many Canadian educators have been learning about the NCLEX-RN and incorporating measures to prepare students for the exam. Some have mapped curriculum to the NCLEX-RN test plan and conducted gap analyses, adding content as a result. Others have introduced new approaches on tests and quizzes to mimic the NCLEX-RN. Schools are supporting faculty by providing information about the NCLEX-RN and supporting their learning through workshops. Schools have also been focused on ensuring students are well-informed about the NCLEX-RN, and using preparatory education programs and resources.

What is the commitment to quality Nursing Education in Canada?

All RN educators are strongly committed to excellence in nursing education. While they are working hard to ensure students are prepared for the NCLEX-RN, they remain committed to ensuring that the full range of Canadian competencies for registered nurses continues to be well integrated into the curricula.

Are there other requirements for registered nurse licensure in Saskatchewan?

NCLEX-RN is but one requirement that SRNA uses to determine eligibility for registered nurse licensure in Saskatchewan. Additional requirements for licensure include graduation from an approved nursing education program; be of good character and fluency in English language.

What other efforts will SRNA take to address any gaps?

The SRNA has strong partnerships with the academic institutions. All bodies are committed to work together to support and develop our resource base in support of each other and to ensure student success.

Other Questions

How many student nurses does Saskatchewan support annually, and what educational opportunities can they access?

The provincial government had announced its commitment to increase the number of nursing seats in Saskatchewan to 690 in 2010. The recognition of the need to increase nursing education opportunities in Saskatchewan was twofold: to begin effective succession planning, as well as to accommodate the increased demand on the health care system, given the changing demographics of a growing aging population.

What is the process for the nursing education program development and approval?

Nursing education in Canada and Saskatchewan is renowned internationally for its high quality. The Saskatchewan nursing education program approval standards and criteria are approved by the SRNA under the provisions of *The Registered Nurses Act, 1988 (The RN Act)*. Clause 19(1)(a)(i)(A)(I) of *The RN Act, 1988*.

In Canada, there are two processes for the evaluation of basic nursing education programs; a provincially regulated approval process and a national voluntary accreditation program through the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN). While the CASN accreditation program is designed to align itself with provincial regulatory approval processes, the two evaluation processes are complementary but not synonymous. More information about the [Program Approval](#) process can be located on the SRNA website.

How can students prepare for the exam?

While students are responsible for preparing for the exam, the SRNA and academic institutions are committed to making resources available to assist. The SRNA has surveyed students who were successful in the first write to learn more about how to be better prepared.

What type of supports do the Nursing Education programs provide?

Academic institutions are adapting how they prepare students. Academic programs are making changes to how they teach the program, as well as the focus of the studies. They are also looking at introducing components into the program to assist students in preparing for the NCLEX-RN.

The NCSBN provides support for the NCLEX-RN through a variety of [online resources](#). In addition to the [resources on the SRNA website](#), the SRNA is currently developing a preparation guide to distribute to students.

How does this affect graduate nurses?

Graduate nurses (GNs) are eligible for a GN license while they prepare to write the NCLEX-RN. Employers mentor and support GNs throughout their GN practice. SRNA and employers are committed to ensure GNs have the support and supervision required to ensure safe patient care.

What is the format of the NCLEX-RN exam and what does it test?

The exam is a computer-adaptive test. The NCLEX-RN only tests knowledge of the entry-to-practice competencies that are needed to provide safe nursing care at the beginning of the RN's career. It does not test knowledge of health care systems, cultural issues, or government policy and laws. In addition, all drug names are generic and refer to medications that entry-level nurses are expected to know. Measurements in metric are provided, as well.

The NCLEX-RN measures safety to enter nursing practice, and does not measure a nurse's knowledge of the health system in which he/she works.

What is the Canadian regulator position on the NCLEX-RN examination?

The Canadian regulators expect that nurses will gain the necessary knowledge about the Canadian health care system over the course of their education programs. Educators prepare students to be ready for nursing practice by integrating into the curriculum the full complement of Saskatchewan's competencies for registered nurses whether or not they are tested on the NCLEX-RN.

Is the NCLEX-RN exam suitable for Canadian nurse use?

The [2014 RN Practice Analysis](#) that contains an analysis of entry-level practice in both the U.S. and Canada is now available for review. The report shows that the exam is suitable for Canadian use.

How does the new NCLEX-RN exam compare with the previous CRNE exam?

There would be difficulty providing any direct comparison between the CRNE (Canadian Registered Nurses Exam) and NCLEX-RN because of three significant factors: test plan construction, measurement methodology, and item "exposure rates" (meaning, how often the test structure allows a writer to go back and re-look at an exam item).

The CRNE and NCLEX-RN use two different approaches to testing. The CRNE test focused on measuring educational competencies. The NCLEX-RN measures competence in nursing practice.

There is also a difference in the traditional "pencil and paper" method of testing and the "computer adaptive test" (CAT) model used for the NCLEX-RN. The CAT is able to measure the exam writer's competencies without having the writer going back and re-looking at answers.

The NCLEX-RN testing model is fully described on the [NCSBN website](#).

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