

Proposed Computer Adaptive Exam for Future RN Candidates in Canada: Q & A

On Dec. 2, 2011, the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) announced that the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) had been selected to partner in the development of a state-of-the-art, computer-adaptive entry exam for future RN candidates. The selection was made by CARNA along with nine other regulatory bodies in Canada. It is anticipated that the exam will replace the current entry exam, the Canadian Registered Nurse Examination (CRNE), in January 2015.

The following Q&A has been developed to help you understand why and how this decision was made and to address any concerns that you or your colleagues may have about the new exam.

Q. Who approves the RN entry exam for nurses entering practice in Alberta?

A. The legislation in Alberta is very clear about the approval process for the Alberta RN registration exam. It is the responsibility of CARNA's Provincial Council to approve the exam for Alberta RN registration. It is also Council's responsibility to decide the factors that will be addressed during the upcoming negotiations process on this issue. These factors include, but are not limited to, ensuring that the exam is based on Canadian content, address protection of privacy of information under Canadian legislation and address any issues related to cultural diversity including the option of provision of the exam in the Canadian culture appropriate French language. The exam must meet all of the appropriate Canadian standards and requirements or Provincial Council will not approve the exam.

Q. What is the proposed agreement between CARNA and NCSBN?

A. CARNA is one of 10 Canadian nurse regulators which has agreed to enter into negotiations with the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) for the development of a state-of-the-art, computer-adaptive licensure exam. The negotiations follow the selection of NCSBN by the regulators in an open bidding process.

NCSBN has proposed that the development of the exam include:

- a review of Canadian entry to practice competencies and other regulatory documents
- a practice analysis of Canadian RN practice
- a review of existing exam bank questions by Canadian RN subject matter experts for cultural sensitivity with veto over any inappropriate items
- involvement of Canadian registered nurses in new exam question development

The 10 Canadian regulators will participate in oversight of the exam development and administration to ensure the exam maintains Canadian standards and supports delivery of safe, quality health care to meet the needs of Canadians.

Q. Who are the Canadian registered nurse regulators?

A. The Canadian registered nurse regulators are the executive directors of 10 provincial jurisdictions. Chief Executive Officer Mary-Anne Robinson, represents CARNA with this group on behalf of CARNA Provincial Council.

Q. What is the NCSBN?

A. NCSBN is a not-for-profit organization whose purpose is to provide an organization through which boards of nursing act and counsel together on matters of common interest and concern affecting the public health, safety and welfare, including the development of licensing examinations in nursing. Members include U.S. boards of nursing and associate members including five Canadian RN regulators.

Q. Why was NCSBN selected?

A. NCSBN was selected because it offered the best option and a proven ability to meet the needs and expectations of the Canadian regulators in its comprehensive search for an exam provider. The search included an open bidding process and an independent assessment of the final proposals by a Canadian psychometric expert (psychometrics is the field of study primarily concerned with the construction and validation of measurement instruments such as tests).

Q. Why change the existing method for exams?

A. Currently, RN candidates write the Canadian Registered Nurse Exam, a paper and pen exam which is developed and maintained by the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA). The exam is offered three times per year and continues to be a valid and reliable assessment of entry level competencies. The exam proposed by NCSBN will offer computer features that make it more affordable, flexible, and accessible year-round. Exam results will be available to regulators within 48 hours leading to more timely registration of nursing candidates.

Q. How does this decision affect CARNA's relationship with CNA?

A. CARNA will maintain its strong relationship with CNA. The president of CARNA will continue to sit and actively participate on the CNA board and represent the best interests of Alberta registered nurses, Canadian registered nurses and the public. CARNA recognizes and supports CNA as the national professional voice of registered nurses, advancing the practice of nursing and the profession in a publicly-funded, not-for-profit health system.

Q. How will the proposed exam address issues of cultural sensitivity?

A. The proposed exam will offer a fair and accurate assessment of a candidate's readiness to practice nursing in Canada. All exam items will be vetted for cultural sensitivity and can be vetoed by the Canadian regulators. It will be offered in both English and French. French Canadian RNs will participate on an expert panel to ensure appropriate French-language content.

Q. When will the computer adaptive RN entry exam be introduced?

A. The goal is to introduce the new exam in January 2015.

Q. How will the exam be administered?

- A.** The exam administration includes the following elements:
- exam-writing testing centres available across Canada
 - online 24/7/365 scheduling in English and French
 - online call centre support in English and French
 - online review and practice tests
 - quarterly reporting to regulatory bodies on psychometric reliability/statistics
 - web-based dashboard for candidate reporting
 - reliable scoring model

Q. Which Canadian regulators participated in the search for an exam provider?

- A.** The participating regulators are the following:
- College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia
 - College of Nurses of Ontario
 - College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta
 - College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba
 - Nurses Association of New Brunswick
 - College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia
 - Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador
 - Association of Registered Nurses of Prince Edward Island
 - Registered Nurses Association of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut
 - Saskatchewan Registered Nurses' Association

Q. What was the selection process?

A. A Request for Proposal (RFP) for the “Development and Delivery of a Computer Adaptive Exam for Entry to the Registered Nurse Profession” was issued by the College of Nurses of Ontario in September 2011 on behalf of the 10 RN regulators. Proposals were accepted by Oct. 21, 2011. The RN regulators conducted a face-to-face interview process with companies that submitted a proposal.

The 10 RN regulators, with the assistance of psychometrician Dr. Bruno Zumbo from the University of British Columbia, met by teleconference November 4 to consider the proposals submitted.

Based on the outcome of the RFP process, the 10 RN regulators recommended that they enter into negotiations with the National Council of State Boards of Nursing. CARNA Provincial Council was notified of the RFP decision on Dec. 1, 2011.

Q. What were the evaluation criteria for selection?

- A.** The NCSBN proposal best met the evaluation criteria in terms of:
- meeting public interest goals: legally defensible, credible and accessible
 - testing entry-level competencies of Canadian nursing practice
 - ensuring the examination would reflect Canadian context
 - stakeholder input in key activities that contribute to exam integrity
 - ensuring examination is available in both English and French
 - affordability to candidates based on a solid business model
 - accessible, secure, and adaptable testing centres
 - frequent and timely statistical analysis and reporting
 - a shared goal of excellence in nursing regulation
 - the ability to adapt to the regulator’s needs as they continue to evolve
 - experience communicating and working with regulatory bodies, transitioning to automated examinations, and delivering excellence in testing services
 - compliance with Canada’s *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* and any applicable provincial/territorial Privacy Acts
 - a proven state of the art product
 - a partner in a global vision recognizing the increased labour mobility of nursing

Q. How will CARNA ensure compliance with Canadian privacy legislation?

- A.** CARNA takes the issue of privacy very seriously. CARNA has been advised that NCSBN has worked through and resolved confidentially issues with more than 300 clients globally. They have worked with the Office of Privacy Commissioner in Canada; are compliant with Canada’s *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA); and are compliant with International Standardization Organization (ISO) and various privacy/security industry standards. Privacy will also be an important factor in the negotiations with NCSBN for the development of the exam. CARNA will seek legal counsel and other expert advice on this issue.

Q. What about the US Patriot Act?

- A.** The *US Patriot Act* is one of the several security-related pieces of legislation passed in 2001, including the *Canadian Anti-Terrorism Act*. CARNA sought legal advice on this issue and was advised that the concern is very real and addressing the issues related to the Act is complex, and yet, not insurmountable. This will be one of the factors that must be addressed and clearly demonstrated in negotiations before CARNA will approve the exam. The 10 regulators will ensure during negotiations that personal information is safeguarded in accordance with Canadian privacy standards.

Q. How will CARNA keep members informed on this development?

- A.** CARNA will provide updates on the development of the exam on our website www.nurses.ab.ca, in *Alberta RN* and in e-newsletters. If you require further information – please contact CARNA directly. For more information on NCSBN, visit www.ncsbn.org.