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| DATE | February 1, 2023 |
| TO | Board Members |
| FROM | Beth DeYoung, Supervising Nursing Education Consultant |
| SUBJECT | Use of High-Stake Assessments: Discussion and Possible Action |

Background

The purpose of this memo is to provide the Board with information regarding the use of high-stake assessments at the precicensure instructional programs for Licensed Vocational Nurses and Psychiatric Technicians and to make recommendations for possible future Board actions.

Definitions:

A. High-Stake Assessments

1. High-stake assessments are the practice of basing major decisions on individual student performance on a single assessment event.
2. High stake means that a single assessment score determines advancement to the next course or successful program completion.
3. A high-stake assessment is any test with significant consequences for the test taker.
4. What differentiates high-stake assessments from low-stake assessments is not how the test is designed but how the results are utilized.
5. In general, high stake means that a single test score determines advancement, such as moving forward to the next term/semester or being considered a graduate of the program.

B. Low-Stake Assessments

1. Low-stake assessments measure academic achievement and identify gaps in understanding the content.
2. The use of low-stake assessments provides meaningful feedback and gives opportunities for improvement through remediation.
3. Remediation assists the student in gaining the knowledge required to pass either NCLEX-PN® or the California Psychiatric Technician Licensure Examination (CAPTLE) for licensure.

C. High-Stake Exit Examination

1. A high-stake exit examination is an assessment used to determine successful completion of a program and graduation status.
2. A student must pass the high-stake exit examination, passing score is determined by the program, to be considered a program graduate.
3. The exit examination evaluates a student's readiness to take the licensure examination by quantifying their probability of passing without further preparation.

D. Method 3 Qualifying Method:

1. Qualification Based on Equivalent Education and/or Experience, section 2873 of the Vocational Nursing Practice Act and section 2516(b) of title 16 of the California Code of Regulations. (Board of Vocational Nursing and Psychiatric Technicians [BVNPT], n.d.-a).
https://www.bvnpt.ca.gov/applicants/summary_vn.shtml
2. Applicants who have acquired formal nursing education from an approved vocational nursing, practical nursing, or registered nursing program may submit official transcripts for evaluation for possible credit without being considered a graduate of the program (BVNPT, n.d.-b). [Method 3: Qualification Based on Equivalent Education and/or Experience - Board of Vocational Nursing & Psychiatric Technicians](#)

High-Stake Assessment to Determine Graduation Status

Programs utilize high-stake assessments during the last term or semester of the program to determine the graduation status of their students. The utilization of high-stake assessments during the last term of the program requires students to pass the assessment to pass the course and graduate from the program.

The high-stake exit examination occurs after the students have successfully completed the prescribed hours of their approved curriculum. If students are unsuccessful in passing the exit examination, they are not considered graduates of the program. Due to their non-graduate status, the students must apply for the licensure examination as Method 3 (equivalency) applicants.

Many Boards of Nursing in other states require graduation from an approved school of nursing. If the student is deemed eligible for licensure in California using another method of qualifying (i.e., military experience or equivalent education and experience) they may not be eligible for licensure by endorsement in other states.

https://www.bvnpt.ca.gov/applicants/summary_vn.shtml

Achieving licensure via the equivalency method may limit the licensee's ability to be hired as a licensed vocational nurse or psychiatric technician.

https://www.bvnpt.ca.gov/applicants/method_3.shtml

Potential Consequences for Students:

Students can experience added stress related to the fear of not passing the course or graduating from the program. Negative financial implications can occur due to delayed graduation or not graduating from the program. Additionally, the added stress can manifest as physical and mental health issues and impede the student's learning ability.

Possible Benefit for Programs

Programs may benefit from utilizing a high-stake exit examination to determine graduation status. The program receives full tuition from all students completing the approved prescribed course of study but is not held accountable for the licensure examination results for Method 3 applicants. This process produces an artificially higher pass rate for the program because applicants who apply under Method 3 are not calculated within the program's average annual pass rate.

Programs may benefit from utilizing high-stake assessments during a term or semester of the prescribed course of study because it will prevent a student from moving forward in the program. If a student is required to achieve a high benchmark passing score on a high-stake assessment during a term or semester, this examination would determine the student's overall success despite success with the prescribed course of study or minimum BVNPT regulatory requirements.

Program Requirements

A student should be considered a graduate of a program if the student successfully meets the approved program requirements of the BVNPT (Board). A high-stake exit examination is not a regulatory requirement of the BVNPT and takes place at the end of the program, or after the approved curriculum has been successfully completed.

Code Sections and Regulations Regarding Licensure:

Business and Professions Code Section 2866. Applicant's Qualifications.

An applicant for a licensed vocational nurse license shall comply with each of the following:

- (a) Be at least 17 years of age.
- (b) Have successfully completed at least an approved course of study through the 12th grade or the equivalent thereof as specified by the board.
- (c) Have successfully completed the prescribed course of study in an approved school of vocational nursing or have graduated from a school which, in the opinion of the board, maintains and gives a course which is equivalent to the minimum requirements for an approved school of vocational nursing in this state.**
- (d) Not be subject to denial of licensure under Section 480.

Business and Professions Code Section 4511 Qualifications of Applicants

An applicant for a psychiatric technician's license shall have the following qualifications:

- (a) Be at least 18 years of age.
- (b) Have successfully completed an approved general education course of study through the 12th grade or the equivalent thereof as determined by the board.
- (c) Have successfully completed (1) a prescribed course of study and training in a school approved by the board, which course of study and training shall combine the nursing knowledge and skills necessary for the care of any ill person and in addition those special skills necessary for the care of the mentally disabled and the developmentally disabled, or (2) a course of study and training which, together with previously acquired training or experience, is determined by a school approved by the board to be equivalent in academic credits to its regular program for psychiatric technician training, or (3) have completed a course of study and training which in the opinion of the board is equivalent to the minimum requirements of an approved program for psychiatric technicians in the state. Clinical inpatient experience shall be an integral part of any such prescribed or equivalent course of study and training.**
- (d) Have committed no act which, if committed by a licensed psychiatric technician, would be grounds for disciplinary action.

Program Responsibilities

Programs should align their curriculum to the licensure examination test plan. Grading standards should be equivalent to those needed to pass the licensure examination.

Programs should have strategies/tools to identify at-risk students early in the program and assist with remediation for students to be successful advancing through the program and ultimately passing the licensure examination.

Programs should have admission requirements to determine readiness and academic levels needed to pass the program and the licensure examination. Students should not be admitted to the program if they do not meet the admission criteria.

Regulations and Guidelines of Other Boards of Nursing:

Nevada:

Nevada Administrative Code Section 632.685(3) curriculum: awarding of credits; standardized examination for completion prohibited:

- 1. The curriculum of a program of nursing must:
 - (a) Reflect the philosophy and objectives of the program.
 - (b) Be based on a rationale that ensures sufficient preparation for the safe and effective practice of nursing; and

(c) Contain theory and clinical experiences that are integrated throughout the program of nursing.

2. Credits for courses must be awarded appropriately.

3. A program of nursing must not use a standardized examination for determining the successful completion of the program (Legal Information Institute [LII], n.d.).

<https://www.law.cornell.edu/regulations/nevada/NAC-632-685>

North Carolina Board of Nursing

“The NCBON does not permit the use of any academic external standardized examinations as a determinant or “gatekeeper” for student course progression nor for program completion or graduation from a nursing education program.” (North Carolina Board of Nursing [NCBON] (2017).

<https://www.ncbon.com/vdownloads/position-statements-decision-trees/external-examination.pdf>

Texas Board of Nursing

“The use of standardized examinations in a high stakes manner is not recommended. Performance on a standardized examination should not prevent students from progressing or graduating. If the score on a standardized examination prevents students from graduation, it is a “high stakes” test.” (Texas Board of Nursing, 2017)

https://www.bon.texas.gov/pdfs/education_pdfs/education_nursing_guidelines/3.7Program_of_Study/3-7-4-a.pdf

Recommendations From Other Entities

National Council of State Boards of Nursing Inc. (NCSBN)

“Encouraging students to take the examination as soon as possible after graduation should be a focus of all nursing programs. Exit examinations that hold students back from taking the NCLEX-RN may also compound students’ problems by preventing them from taking the NCLEX-RN when their chances are best to pass it.” (Spector & Alexander, 2006, p. 292)

<https://www.ncsbn.org/research-item/exit-exams-a-regulatory-perspective>

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6871901_Exit_Exams_from_a_Regulatory_Perspective

National League for Nursing (NLN)

“Requiring a predetermined score for students to graduate and/or to take the NCLEX to ensure that program pass rates remain at state board-prescribed levels can be detrimental to those who have successfully passed all components of the nursing program.” (National League for Nursing [NLN], 2010)

<https://www.nln.org/detail-pages/resource/Reflection-Dialogue-7-High-Stakes-Testing-December-2010>

“High stakes testing, and progression/graduation policies can also distort the intended purpose of NCLEX pass rate requirements. First-time pass rates are viewed by stakeholders as a measure of program quality. Nursing programs that achieve high first-time pass rates by allowing only the highest performing students sit for the licensing exam illustrate the well-known effects of selection bias.” (National League for Nursing [NLN], 2012)

<https://www.nln.org/docs/default-source/uploadedfiles/about/nln-vision-series-position-statements/nlvision-4.pdf>

Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN)

“The use of high-stakes testing for students’ progression or completion of a nursing program is typically not the intended purpose of a standardized test, not a best educational practice, and is strongly discouraged” (Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing [ACEN], 2021, p. 43)

<https://www.acenursing.org/About/Report-to-Constituents/RTC2020.pdf>

Assessment Technology Institute (ATI)

ATI is “not designed for high-stakes purposes such as graduation requirements, and we do not recommend that they are used in this manner.” (Assessment Technologies Institute [ATI], n.d.) <https://www.atitesting.com/home/ordering-information>

Elsevier/Health Educational Systems Inc. (HESI)

“Standardized tests do not create the high-stakes environment. It is the program policy developed by faculty on standardized tests that may cause a negative impact. Factors that create negative impact include high grading weight or consequence and/or a benchmark established that limits course or program progression or denying the ability to take licensure exam.” (Mee & Timken, n.d., p. 3)

<https://evolve.elsevier.com/education/expertise/review-testing/hesi-assessments-and-policy-considerations-finding-a-happy-medium/>

Staff Recommendations:

1. Staff recommends that the Board approve further research and analysis of the use and impacts of high-stakes assessment concept as outlined in the memorandum and provide recommendations for future Board action.
2. Staff recommends that the Board authorize staff to collect, analyze and share information from California schools regarding the use of high-stakes assessment.

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