



## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT PCCN® CERTIFICATION

**What is PCCN certification?**

PCCN certification is a credential granted by the AACN Certification Corporation that validates your knowledge of nursing care of acutely ill adult patients to hospital administrators, peers, patients, and most importantly, to yourself. PCCN certification promotes continuing excellence in progressive care nursing.

**Why a progressive care certification?**

A national practice analysis of progressive care nursing conducted in 2008 validated the progressive care environment, the patient populations served and the core competencies, basic knowledge and skills needed by progressive care nurses. The acuity of patients admitted to hospitals has steadily increased and with it the demand for critical care beds. With this demand and decreased availability of critical care beds, patients are often transferred from critical care units while still requiring an increased level of nursing care and vigilance. Patients who were formerly admitted to critical care units are now routinely admitted to progressive care units.

**What does PCCN stand for?**

PCCN is a registered service mark and stands for "Progressive Care Certified Nurse." Progressive care is the term used by AACN to collectively describe areas in which acutely ill patients are cared for, such as intermediate care units, direct observation units, stepdown units, telemetry units, transitional care units and emergency departments, as well as to define a specific level of patient care. AACN recognizes progressive care as part of the continuum of critical care.

**Why would I want to obtain PCCN certification?**

PCCN certification helps you maintain an up-to-date knowledge base of care of acutely ill adult patients. In addition to providing you with a sense of professional pride and achievement, PCCN certification reinforces the special knowledge and experiences required for progressive care nursing. Research studies link higher levels of clinical knowledge, skill and experience with certification.

**What are the PCCN exam eligibility requirements?**

Current unencumbered licensure as an RN or APRN in the U.S. is required. Practice as an RN is required for 1,750 hours in direct bedside care of acutely ill adult patients during the two-year period prior to application, with 875 of those hours accrued in the most recent year preceding application. For more information about PCCN eligibility please refer to the *Certification Exam Handbook* or visit our Web site at [www.certcorp.org](http://www.certcorp.org).

**Which nurses are eligible to sit for the PCCN exam?**

The PCCN exam is for nurses who work at the bedside of acutely ill adult patients, in areas such as stepdown or telemetry units (see list above) - or in other units as appropriate. Final determination of eligibility is not based on unit type but on patient acuity, as patient placement varies by facility and bed availability.

**Should I take the PCCN exam or the CCRN exam?**

This will depend on the acuity of the patients you care for in your practice. Progressive care defines care delivered to patients whose needs fall along the less acute end of the critical care continuum. Nursing care required is determined by patient needs rather than a geographic location. Refer to the test plans for each exam to identify content areas tested and see how your practice aligns.



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How many questions are on the exam, and what content is covered?

The 2 ½ hour PCCN exam contains 125 items; 100 items are scored and 25 are unscored and used to gather statistical data on item performance for future exams. The items are based on the AACN Synergy Model for Patient Care, with 80% focusing on clinical judgment and 20% focusing on professional caring and ethical practice. The PCCN Test Plan, found in the *Certification Exam Handbook*, provides a breakdown of content areas.

How do I sign up for the PCCN exam?

You may register online at [www.certcorp.org](http://www.certcorp.org) > Apply Online. For information about the exam and a paper application, refer to the *Certification Exam Handbook*, available at no charge online at [www.certcorp.org](http://www.certcorp.org) under Documents and Handbooks, or by requesting a copy via e-mail at [certcorp@aacn.org](mailto:certcorp@aacn.org).

When is the PCCN exam offered?

The PCCN exam is offered via computer-based testing year-round, Monday through Saturday, at more than 170 testing sites across the U.S. A paper-and-pencil version of the PCCN exam is offered each year in May at AACN's National Teaching Institute (NTI®) and TRENDS educational conferences.

How soon after testing will I find out if I passed the PCCN exam?

Those who complete the exam via computer-based testing will receive their results and a score report immediately upon completion of the test. Those who complete the exam via paper and pencil testing will receive their results and score report by mail approximately 6 weeks after testing.

Once I pass the exam, how long is my PCCN certification effective?

PCCN certification is recognized for a three-year period. You may recertify by either retaking and passing the PCCN exam or by meeting the requirements of the Renewal by Synergy CERPs (Continuing Education Recognition Points) program during the three-year certification period. You must also maintain current unencumbered RN or APRN licensure and meet the clinical practice requirement of 432 hours of direct bedside care of acutely ill adult patients, with 144 of those hours accrued in the year prior to your scheduled renewal date. Renewal candidates have the option of Online Renewal at [www.certcorp.org](http://www.certcorp.org).

If I do not pass the PCCN exam on the first attempt, what can I do?

Referring to your PCCN exam score report, you will want to identify the topic areas in which you have the most room for improvement. For additional information refer to our Web site at [www.certcorp.org](http://www.certcorp.org), select Prepare to Take Your Exam. Candidates may sit for the PCCN exam up to four times in a 12-month period. A discounted retest fee is available to candidates who do not pass the exam. The discounted rate is available until the exam is passed.

How do I renew my PCCN?

PCCN certification is recognized for a three-year period. During that time, you must continue to maintain current, unencumbered RN or APRN licensure and complete the Renewal by Synergy CERPs program requirements or pass the PCCN exam. You must also have met the clinical practice requirement of 432 hours of direct bedside care of acutely ill adult patients, with 144 of those hours accrued in the year prior to your scheduled renewal date. Refer to the *CCRN/PCCN Renewal Handbook* available at [www.certcorp.org](http://www.certcorp.org); to renew online, select Renew Your Certification.



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How are CERPs calculated?

Continuing Education Recognition Points (CERPs) are similar to contact hours, or CEs. They are not referred to as CEs or contact hours because "Recognition Points" are also awarded for activities that don't strictly fall into the contact hour category, such as writing articles, serving on committees, or doing a professional presentation. One CE or contact hour of class time is equal to one CERP (e.g., a six-hour BLS course minus lunch and breaks is worth 6 CERPs).

What are the different Renewal by Synergy CERPs categories?

Renewing PCCN candidates must complete a minimum of 100 CERPs during the three-year certification period, with at least 60 CERPs in Category A and 10 each in categories B and C; the other 20 CERPs may be in any of the three categories (A, B or C). The following list of examples is not all-inclusive.

**Category A** CERP examples include: lab values, BLS, ACLS, ECG, IV therapy, heart failure, pharmacology, assessment, pathophysiology, technical skills/new equipment, statistics, clinical research, evidence-based practice, auditing, publishing, practice protocols, QI/QA, clinical aspects of bioterrorism, exam reviews, PCCN Self-Assessment Exam (SAE).

**Category B** CERP examples include: safety, legal or ethical issues, charting/documentation, reducing medication errors, public policy, HIPAA, Joint Commission, end-of-life care, advance directives, comfort/pain control, stress management, patient support groups, geriatric care, diversity, cultural aspects of care, medical Spanish, therapeutic communication, psychosocial aspects of care, spiritual considerations, preceptorship/mentoring, teaching in-services/programs, developing patient education tools, value of certification.

**Category C** CERP examples include: communication skills, teamwork, healthy work environments, AACN Synergy Model for Patient Care, redesigning hospital care, disaster/emergency planning, developing policies or procedures, committees, leadership and management, risk management, community resources, case management, AACN membership.

For more information about Renewal by Synergy CERPs, including a PowerPoint presentation with narration, visit [www.certcorp.org](http://www.certcorp.org), select PCCN.

Can I still maintain my PCCN credential if I move away from providing direct bedside care to acutely ill adult patients?

If you are no longer eligible for active PCCN status, you may apply for Inactive status, Alumnus PCCN status, or Retired PCCN status. More information about these options can be found in the *CCRN/PCCN Renewal Handbook*. Applications for Alumnus and Retired status are available online at [www.certcorp.org](http://www.certcorp.org) under Documents and Handbooks.

Can I meet the PCCN clinical hour eligibility requirement for practice hours completed outside the U.S.?

Eligible clinical practice hours for AACN Certification Corporation exams or certification renewal are those completed in U.S.-based or Canada-based facilities or in facilities determined to be comparable to the U.S. standard of acute/critical care nursing practice, as evidenced by ANCC Magnet Status or Joint Commission International accreditation.