

Executive Summary

In 2005-2006, Professional Examination Service conducted a practice analysis of Adult, Family and Gerontology nurse practitioners for the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners Certification Program (AANPCP). The purpose of the practice analysis was to gather empirical data regarding current practice in the profession in order to: (1) update the test content outlines for the existing AANPCP certification examinations for Adult and Family nurse practitioners, and (2) create a test content outline for a new certification examination for Gerontology nurse practitioners.

The current content outlines for the Adult and Family programs specify the number of test questions to address each of five major domains of practice as well as the number of questions to address different patient age categories. The Adult and Family programs have the same number of questions for each domain, but a different number of questions for each age range. The test content outlines for both programs include identical lists of tasks performed in practice and knowledge areas required in order to perform the tasks. A two-phase approach was implemented to conduct the study. In the first phase, a 13-member subject-matter expert team was appointed to review and update the domains, tasks, and knowledge areas from the current content outlines. Five of the PATF members represented the Adult specialty focus, four represented Family, and four represented Gerontology. The group developed an updated delineation of nurse practitioner practice consisting of six tasks across four domains of practice: Assessment, Diagnosis, Plan, and Evaluation, and 20 knowledge areas.

In the second phase of the study, a survey was developed and administered to gather data from practicing nurse practitioners to validate the updated domains, tasks, and knowledge areas and develop test content outlines for the three examinations. Survey participants were asked to indicate the percentage of a clinically-based certification examination for nurse practitioners that should focus on each domain. For tasks, participants were asked to rate how often during a typical clinical day they performed each task and how important each task is to protecting patients from health-related harm. For knowledge areas, participants were asked to rate how frequently they used each knowledge area in their clinical practice and how important is it for a new nurse practitioner to possess the knowledge. The survey included a background information section. In addition to professional and demographic background questions, it included a question regarding the percentage of respondents' patients in different age ranges. This question was included in order to gather data to use in determining the number of questions to address each patient age category.

The paper-and-pencil validation survey was mailed to 750 AANPCP-certified Adult nurse practitioners and 900 AANPCP-certified Family nurse practitioners. A 500-member Gerontology sample was drawn from a nurse practitioner workforce database that AANP maintains for the federal government. The return rate for the survey was 36%, which is in the normal range for this type of survey.

Respondents rated all six tasks as frequently performed and highly important to protecting patients from health-related harm. All 20 of the knowledge areas were rated at least moderately important for a new nurse practitioner to possess. Fourteen of the 20 knowledge areas were used frequently-to-always on average; the remaining six were used occasionally-to-frequently on average. The validation ratings were sufficiently high to warrant the inclusion of all 6 tasks and all 20 knowledge areas in the test content outlines.

In addition, ratings by the Adult, Family, and Gerontology samples were nearly identical, confirming the appropriateness of the delineation for all three certification examinations. PES created test specifications for the examination programs using the survey data. The number of questions to address each domain was derived from respondents' estimates of the percentage of the examination that should cover each domain. The number of questions to address each patient age category was derived from respondents' ratings of the percentage of their patients that fell within in each age range. The final test content outlines adopted by AANPCP specified identical numbers of items per domain, but different numbers of items by patient age, for the Adult, Family, and Gerontology programs. The empirical guidance provided by the practice analysis regarding the relative focus on each domain and patient age, plus the validated tasks and knowledge areas, will form the basis for future AANPCP item writing and examination construction efforts.