

## **Proposed Education Guideline for Using Standardized Examinations**

### **Summary of Request:**

Consider proposed Education Guideline for Using Standardized Examinations.

### **Background:**

- Board staff receive numerous calls from students, parents and legislators about the use of standardized examinations as a graduation requirement from nursing educational programs.
- In many instances the program director refuses to sign the affidavit of graduation until the student achieves a designated score on the standardized exam.
- At the January 2010 Board meeting, the following charge was issued to the Advisory Committee on Education (ACE):  
*Develop a position statement related to the effective use of the commercially prepared benchmark standardized examination tests as an evaluation method in the progression of students in nursing educational programs.*
- Board staff conducted a query asking twenty-four (24) programs about strategies implemented to improve NCLEX pass rates after the programs experienced a drop in annual pass rates. Sixty-six percent (66%) of respondents indicated they had incorporated a standardized testing package in the curriculum. This information indicates a growing trend in nursing programs toward more use of standardized exams and reliance upon the exam results in student progression and curriculum design.

### **ACE Actions Since the January Board Meeting:**

- Board staff interviewed two (2) examination vendors to assist the ACE committee in addressing this issue.
- Information from the two vendors indicated some commonalities about the established purposes of the exams, recommendations from vendors, and cautions about using the exams as “high stake” indicators.
- Information was presented to ACE members. A draft of an education guideline to assist programs in the use of standardized examinations was discussed and approved.
- The draft was submitted to the National League for Nursing, also a provider of standardized tests, and feedback incorporated into the guideline.
- The decision to publish an education guideline rather than a position statement was based upon the fact that Board rules allow programs to establish their own policies related to the use of educational materials.
- The draft has been reviewed by ACE and members of the Education Liaison Committee (ELC) (See Attachment #1).

### **Staff Recommendation:**

Move to approve the Education Guideline on Using Standardized Examinations for publication on the web page to meet the January 2010 Board charge and to assist nursing educational programs in the effective use of standardized exams.

### **Draft - Proposed Education Guideline Using Standardized Examinations**

Many vocational and professional nursing educational programs have incorporated the use of standardized examinations into the curriculum in various ways. Though the Texas BON has no authority over a nursing program's decisions to utilize standardized exams, Board staff respond to numerous reports and questions from students, parents, and policy-makers about the use of standardized tests, especially when they are used as a graduation requirement.

Board staff interviewed three exam vendors in order to clarify the intended purposes for standardized examinations and to assist nursing programs in their use.

Suggested purposes for nursing programs to use standardized examinations include:

- An assessment tool of potential or enrolled students providing:
  - o data serving as one component of the admission criteria;
  - o a gauge of students' strengths and weaknesses (for remediation purposes);
  - o an indicator of the need for early remediation for students experiencing difficulties to assist in their success in the program; and/or
  - o a comprehensive predictor for performance on the NCLEX examination.
  
- An assessment tool of the program's effectiveness providing:
  - o trend data on cohort performance;
  - o national comparison of student performance;
  - o valid and reliable feedback of student knowledge in "standardized content areas;"
  - o data to monitor the effectiveness of specific course, level, and program curriculum revisions;
  
  - o an assessment measure of effectiveness of course content delivery; and/or
  - o an evaluation of curriculum content for revision purposes.
  
- An assistive tool to familiarize students with computerized testing.

Based upon information from vendors who were interviewed, it is recommended that when standardized examinations are used by nursing programs:

- Individual exams should be carefully placed across the curriculum with planned remediation as indicated. The correct placement of exams is determined by the specific program of study.
- An academic progression policy should clarify the use and frequency of the standardized examinations and the use of the test results.
- The plan for the use of all standardized exams should be reviewed with the school's legal counsel.
- The academic progression policy should be written and published in an accessible and public format. Any changes in policies regarding the use of standardized exams should be implemented when the student first enrolls in the program or at the beginning of each class or academic term.
- Students may be asked to sign their receipt of the academic progression policy.

Note: Standardized exams can be valuable tools to assist in the identification of student strengths and weaknesses but are not a replacement for the evaluation of student progress in meeting specific program objectives.

Cautions for the use of standardized examinations:

- Standardized examinations are not recommended as "high stakes testing" where the passing score is the sole determinant of progression or graduation.
- Standardized tests should be placed at appropriate points consistent with didactic content and clinical learning experiences.
- Programs should not pattern curriculum changes solely upon testing results but should consider multiple evaluation criteria in their curriculum evaluation.
- Programs should be aware of any security issues about the standardized examination test pool before relying upon testing results as a progression criterion.

Evidence indicates that a remediation plan for nursing students is helpful in promoting success on the NCLEX examination. Using standardized examinations as an indicator of the need for remediation is only one strategy to assist nursing students in successful preparation for licensure.