

## **Report of the Status of Board-Required Refresher Courses**

### **Historical Perspective:**

Refresher Courses are mandated for nurses who have not practiced nursing and who have failed to maintain a current license from any licensing authority for four or more years. Refresher Courses are designed to update knowledge of current nursing theory and clinical practice to ensure competence of nurses re-entering nursing practice.

According to Board Rule 217.3 Temporary Authorization to Practice/Temporary Permit, Section (b), "A nurse who has not practiced nursing for four or more years may be issued a temporary permit for the limited purpose of completing a refresher course, extensive orientation to the practice of professional or vocational nursing, whichever is applicable, or academic course."

Board Rule 217.6 Failure to Renew Licensure provides rules for renewal of an expired nursing license in Texas. The process for renewal varies depending upon completion of the jurisprudence examination, evidence of completing the continuing education requirements, and lack of practice experience for four or more years since the date of license expiration. Applicants who have not practiced for four years or more are required to apply for a Six-Month Temporary Permit and complete a Nurse Refresher Course.

Inactive licensed nurses desiring to renew nursing licensure may complete a Nurse Refresher Course by enrolling in and successfully completing:

- A Nurse Refresher Course;
- An extensive orientation program; or
- An academic nursing course.

Each Nurse Refresher Course is comprised of the following three components:

- Didactic Content;
- Skills Lab instruction; and
- Supervised clinical learning experiences (minimum of 80 hours).

Although the Texas Board of Nursing (Board) does not formally approve Refresher Courses, Board rules mandate that a six-month temporary permit be obtained prior to an individual engaging in any clinical learning experiences. Board rules do set forth course content and the percentage of time to be assigned to each content area.

(Note: Refresher Courses are different from Remedial Education Courses in that Remedial Education Courses are mandated to fulfill requirements in a Board Order related to disciplinary action. Remedial Education Courses are specific to the deficits in nursing practice identified following the investigation of a complaint. The purpose for Refresher Courses is to provide inactive nurses with a review and update of their nursing knowledge, a familiarity with technological advances, and opportunities to refine their nursing skills.)

## **Course Content:**

Essential elements with recommended percentages of time for the content of a Refresher Course for registered nurses (RNs) include:

- 1) Review of NPA, Rules, Position Statements (15%);
- 2) Determination of Individual Scope of Practice (5%);
- 3) Review of the nursing process to include assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation (30%);
- 4) Pharmacology review (20%);
- 5) Medication administration (20%);
- 6) Documentation, quality assurance, and legal implication for nursing practice (10%);
- 7) Documentation of current CPR certification prior to beginning precepted clinical learning experiences;
- 8) Supervised clinical experience providing direct patient care (minimum of 80 hours); and
- 9) Documentation of successful completion of Didactic Content of the Refresher Course.

Each content area must have the course description, goals and objectives, resources to be utilized, breakdown-down of didactic and clinical content, and methods to be used to determine successful completion of the course. Total didactic and clinical hours should be based on individual need and a comprehensive assessment of the competency level of the learner. The Differentiated Competencies of Graduates of Texas Nursing Programs (DECs) should serve as the guideline for the evaluation of competency. An RN Instructor must provide the didactic portion of the course. Clinical oversight can be conducted by an RN Preceptor for RN learners and an RN Preceptor or Licensed Vocational Nurse (LVN) Preceptor for LVN learners.

The didactic content for LVN learners varies from the identified essential elements for RNs, specific to the following two items:

- 1) Item #3 for LVN learners includes the Review of the clinical problem solving process for the provision of individualized, goal directed nursing care to include:
  - a) Collecting data and performing focused nursing assessments;
  - b) Participating in the planning of nursing care needs for clients;
  - c) Participating in the development and modification of the comprehensive nursing care plan for assigned clients;
  - d) Implementing appropriate aspects of care within the LVN scope of practice; and
  - e) Assisting in the evaluation of the client's responses to nursing interventions and the identification of client needs.
- 2) Item #6 for LVN learners identifies that Documentation principles/practices be included.

The rules are not prescriptive as to the specific setting in which the clinical hours must be completed; however, the optimal setting would offer a wide variety of direct patient-care experiences. Since the clinical learning objectives guide the activities, any setting that would allow learners to meet the course objectives would be appropriate. It is recommended that any nursing functions carried out by the learner, under the supervision of the instructor or preceptor, shall be in alignment with the clinical facility's policies and procedures.

Although the Board does not have specific requirements for the number of preceptors the learner may be assigned to during the 80 hours of clinical learning experiences, the Board recommends that the learner work with one preceptor if possible. There is a greater opportunity to identify any

weaknesses or need for immediate remediation if only one preceptor monitors the learner's progression throughout the program.

Further, the Board does not establish a schedule for learner completion of the 80 hours of clinical learning experiences. Learners may accomplish the required 80 hours by working 40 hours per week for two weeks, 20 hours per week for four weeks, or develop any configuration to total 80 hours that is mutually agreed upon by the learner, the preceptor, and the clinical facility. It is important to be mindful that the temporary permit is valid for only six months and is not renewable. Resultantly, applicants for the temporary permit are advised to research, locate, and secure both the didactic and clinical instruction prior to making application to the Board.

### **National Data:**

The 2018 National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) Member Board Profiles asked if there is a requirement to retake the NCLEX if an RN or LVN license has been expired for a certain period of time in order to reinstate the license? Of the 54 responses, 38 boards replied "No", five boards replied "Yes", and 11 boards responded that retaking the NCLEX is one option for reinstatement.

The 2018 NCSBN Member Board Profiles asked if there is a requirement to take an approved refresher course if an RN or LVN license has been expired for a certain period of time in order to reinstate the license? Of the 54 responses, 11 (20%) boards replied "No", 28 (52%) boards replied "Yes", and 15 (28%) boards responded that a refresher course is one option for reinstatement.

### **Texas Board of Nursing RN Education Program Survey:**

In October 2019, a 4-item survey was sent to the 126 Board approved RN Education Programs in Texas, to ask the following questions:

- 1) Do you currently offer a Nurse Refresher Course at your school?
- 2) If YES, is the course active?
- 3) When did the school last offer the Refresher Course?
- 4) Does your school plan to offer a Nurse Refresher Course in the future?

These items were considered appropriate as the Education Consultants are aware that programs offer Refresher Courses in response to the requests of nurses in the geographical area. The local needs may vary from year to year; therefore, programs may elect to offer or to cease offering Nurse Refresher Courses. Ninety-one of the 126 Board approved RN Programs responded to the survey.

Question #1: Ten (10.99%) programs currently offer a Refresher Course while 81 programs (89.01%) do not.

Question #2: Of the nine programs responding YES to this question, seven (77.78%) replied that the course is active whereas two (22.22%) replied that the course is not active.

Question #3: Of the total 91 replies, 17 respondents skipped this question and 74 replied. The responses ranged from "Never" to "Fall 2017". The most common reason for no longer offering the Refresher Course is "lack of interest".

Question #4: Thirteen (16.46%) programs stated they are planning to offer a Nurse Refresher Course in the future, dependent upon community needs. Sixty-five programs (82.28%) responded “No” to this question; however, responses indicated that if a school becomes aware of a local need, the school will consider developing and establishing a Nurse Refresher Course.

### **Board Licensure Data:**

During the time period of 2013 through 2019, the following numbers of learners completed Nurse Refresher Courses and submitted Verification of Successful Completion forms. The table below presents the data:

Year                      Completers

|      |      |
|------|------|
| 2013 | 848  |
| 2014 | 1262 |
| 2015 | 1040 |
| 2016 | 859  |
| 2017 | 371  |
| 2018 | 894  |
| 2019 | 736  |

### **Refresher Courses in Texas:**

#### **University of Texas Health Science Center – San Antonio (UTHSC – SA) RN Refresher Course**

According to Joyce Borgfeld, DNP, RN, NE-BC, former RN Refresher Course Coordinator, the RN Refresher Course, offered by the Department of Lifelong Learning in the university’s school of nursing, was launched in 2010 in response to the needs of nurses in the San Antonio community with inactive licenses who desired to reenter the nursing workforce or nurses with current licenses who wished to change practice settings. The course now has two enrollment cohorts per year, in spring and fall. Summer courses have not been offered since 2017 due to difficulties obtaining clinical placements for learners during peak vacation times.

Kimberly Cox, MS, RN, NE-BC, Colonel, USAF (Ret), RN Refresher Course Instructor/Coordinator, submitted that three different options are available for learners: the full course, the online didactic and skills lab course, and the online didactic course. The online didactic portion is designed to be completed in 14 weeks, the skills lab activities require 16 hours, and the clinical learning component is 80 hours.

The total number of nurses completing the course in 2018 was 27, with 22 nurses completing the full course, four nurses completing the online didactic and skills lab portions, and one nurse completing the online didactic only. The enrollment goal is 10 learners per semester and that goal has been exceeded each semester since Fall 2016.

#### **Austin Community College (ACC) Nurse ReEntry/Refresher Course:**

The ACC Course evolved from a 2003 Carl D. Perkins state leadership grant project with the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board initiating the Distance Learning Reentry Nurse Refresher Program. The goal of the project was to develop a quality distance learning nurse refresher course for RNs and LVNs desiring to return to nursing practice.

The distance learning course was produced through the Virtual College of Texas with ACC hosting the delivery of the didactic content. Students could complete the skills lab component at ACC or at a community college in their area, then engage in clinical learning experiences in a local clinical facility.

ACC Course Coordinator Wendy Pickard, BS, RN, explained that the LVN and RN Refresher Courses are comprised of didactic content, skills lab experiences, and direct patient care experiences. The didactic portion for the LVN Refresher Course and the RN Refresher Course requires 128 hours for completion. One cohort of 10 LVN students is admitted each semester whereas two groups of 10 RN students per cohort are enrolled each semester. In 2018, 50 RNs and 23 LVNs completed the three portions of the course at ACC. The provided six-year historical data indicate an increasing number of annual enrollments, as a total of 32 RNs and LVNs completed the course in 2013.

The primary challenge for the ACC Nurse Re-Entry/Refresher Course and nurse learners is securing clinical learning experiences. Yet, many learners are able to obtain clinical sites independently.

#### A Professional Health Healthcare Education Service, Inc. (PHES) Nurse Refresher Course:

PHES, a private provider of Nurse Refresher Courses, began offering the courses in 2001, and now conducts them in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, San Marcos, and Texarkana. According to the Course Director, Yvette Cheeks, MSN, RN, PHES consistently graduates over 87% of the enrolled nurse learners and the majority are working in the profession within six months.

A targeted assessment is accomplished upon the nurse learner's admission to the course to ensure learning plans are individualized. The needs of a nurse who worked one year and was out of the nursing workforce for 15 years are vastly different from those of a nurse who worked 10 years and was out of the nursing workforce for five years.

Skills lab objectives depend on shared decision-making and clinical competencies evaluated on the first day, as well as the individual nurse learner's career path. However, all learners are provided the minimum number of 80 hours of clinical learning experiences as mandated in the Board's *Verification of Successful Completion Form*.

The enrollment appears to be cyclical, closely related to the Texas economy. After the 2008 recession, 126 nurse learners completed the PHES Nurse Refresher Course and, in 2014, 148 nurse learners finished the course. Recently, 82 learners completed.

Clinical placements are challenging to obtain, requiring copious amounts of paperwork. Though successes have been realized with several sites recruiting and employing the Refresher Nurses.

#### **Summary:**

Nursing Refresher Courses provide a strategy to help lessen the nursing workforce shortage by helping seasoned nurses return to practice in a timely manner. The courses serve to not only expand an individual's nursing knowledge, skills, and abilities, but also to assist the reentry nurse develop self-confidence.

This report is for information only. No Board action is required.