

Report of the Status of Nurse Refresher Courses in Texas

Summary:

During the summer of 2022, Board staff noted an increased number of inquiries from nurses with lapsed licenses who wanted to return to active practice and were requesting detailed information about how to do so. Anecdotal comments indicated financial needs were the driving force for these individuals to reactivate their vocational or professional nursing license to rejoin the Texas nursing workforce.

Data points have been collected since mid-August 2022 to document the number of calls and e-mail communications from individuals seeking clarification about the process of reactivating their nursing license, specifically about the process of completing a Nurse Refresher Course (NRC). The inquiries were from nurses throughout the United States as well as Canada and Europe.

Month	Number of Inquiries
Mid-month to end of August	9
September	26
October	29
November	31
December	32

Resultantly, it seemed appropriate to examine the Texas Board of Nursing's (Board's) procedures to reactivate nursing licensure. Based on multiple database searches, a scarcity of current literature is available about NRCs.

Historical Perspective:

A nursing shortage that emerged during the 1980s created interest in recruiting non-practicing nurses back into practice to help provide nursing staff for health care facilities. In order to facilitate the effort, academic settings and employers supported the idea of providing refresher courses to prepare returning nurses to re-enter the workforce (Yancy & Handley, 2004).

According to the Texas Center for Nursing Workforce Studies (TCNWS) *Updated Nurse Supply and Demand Projections 2018-2032*, Texas will experience a significant shortage of all types of nurses (vocational, professional, and advanced practice) by 2032. Based on current data, there is an expected deficit of 57,012 full-time equivalent Registered Nurses (RNs) and an expected deficit of 12,572 full-time equivalent Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVNs) by 2032 (TCNWS, 2022). Considering this predicted shortage of nurses, it may be wise to review the process in Texas for reactivating expired licenses of nurses who have been away from nursing practice for four or more years.

Regulations in Texas:

Rule 217.6 provides rules for renewal of an expired nursing license in Texas. The process for renewal requires successful completion of the nursing jurisprudence examination as well as

evidence of fulfillment of continuing education requirements. Applicants who have not practiced nursing for four or more years are required to apply for a six-month temporary permit and complete one of the following: a board approved refresher course, an extensive orientation, or a nursing program of study.

Data from the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) Member Board Profiles (2021) indicated that 52% of boards responding to the survey reported they require a refresher course for nurses to reactivate their nursing license. Further, 21% of boards responding to the survey reported they do not require a refresher course while 27% responded that a refresher program is one option for reinstatement (NCSBN, 2021).

Refresher vs. Reeducation

As stated, refresher courses are designed for individuals who were previously licensed as RNs or LVNs but who had not practiced nursing in four or more years. Reeducation is required for individuals who had not successfully completed the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) within four years of nursing program graduation and at no time had been licensed as RNs or LVNs.

Education Guideline 3.12.7.a. Reeducation of Candidates Who Fail to be Licensed within Four Years of Graduation establishes the process for nursing administrators and faculty of a nursing education program to consider when deciding to offer the option of reeducation. The essential elements presented in the guideline include: criteria for admission; assessment strategies to determine a student's needs for nursing courses and non-nursing courses; methods for addressing the individual learner's needs; and strategies for evaluation of the learner's achievement.

The criteria for successful completion of a nursing education program should demonstrate that the individual has the knowledge, skills, and clinical behaviors/judgment that are comparable to those required of other students who complete the requirements of the nursing education program. The nursing education program, not the Board, determines whether to offer the option of reeducation to individuals. The NCLEX outcome (pass/not pass) of the candidate will be used to calculate the examination year pass rate of the nursing education program.

Refresher Courses vs. Remedial Education Courses

Refresher courses are different from remedial education courses in that remedial education courses are designed to meet the sanctions imposed by Board issued Agreed Orders to address identified deficits in nursing practice subsequent to the investigation of a formal complaint. The courses contain essential elements described in each Agreed Order and address an individual nurse's competency deficiencies.

The course may consist of didactic content or both didactic and clinical instruction. Didactic content must include six hours of instruction, whereas the clinical learning experiences total 24 hours in length, and, typically, are completed over a three-day period. Long-term care and rehabilitation settings are frequently utilized for the clinical learning experiences as learner objectives can be effectively met in these environments.

Remedial education courses must have formal Board approval prior to a provider offering the course(s) to participants. Course topics include: nursing jurisprudence and ethics; nursing documentation; medication administration with clinical component; and physical assessment with clinical component.

Renewal of Nursing License in Texas:

The applicant for renewal of a Texas nursing license who has not practiced nursing for four or more years is presented with three options:

1. Complete a refresher program (didactic and clinical components) meeting the requirements for the specific license with verification from instructor/preceptor.
2. Identify a practice area that will provide an extensive orientation and validate that the applicant has met the didactic and clinical components in the Board application.
3. Engage the assistance of a nursing education program to provide the didactic content and clinical practice required in the Board application.

In Texas, the *Verification of Successful Completion of Nursing Refresher Course/Extensive Orientation/Academic Nursing Course(s)* is required to be submitted as evidence of completion of the essential elements needed for licensure reactivation. Extensive orientations at a clinical facility may be offered to refresher nurses as a method to ensure the nurse who has not actively practiced nursing in four or more years is safe and competent to return to the provision of direct patient care. However, the Board does not have purview to mandate a Chief Nursing Officer or Director of Nursing open their clinical facility as a clinical learning experience for refresher nurses. Individuals seeking to reactive their nursing license are a potential rich source of new staff members.

This report focuses on the refresher option since the rule indicates it is Board-approved.

Application Process and Curriculum:

For nurses who have expired licenses and have not practiced for four or more years, the completion of specific areas of study for each type of program (LVN and RN) **plus** 80 hours of supervised clinical practice are required. Specified content areas for each educational level are provided in the table below:

Knowledge/Skill for LVN	Knowledge/Skill for RN	Percent of Content
Review of NPA, Rules, Position Statements	Review of NPA, Rules, Position Statements	15%
Determining Individual Scope of Practice and role in patient safety	Determination of Individual Scope of Practice and role in patient safety	5%
Review of the clinical problem-solving process for the provision of individualized, goal directed nursing care to include: (a) Collecting data & performing focused nursing assessments;	Review of the nursing process to include assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation.	

(b) Participating in the planning of nursing care needs for clients; (c) Participating in the development & modification of the comprehensive nursing care plan for assigned clients. (d) Implementing appropriate aspects of care within the LVN's scope of practice; (e) Assisting in the evaluation of the client's responses to nursing interventions and the identification of client needs.		30%
Pharmacology Review	Pharmacology Review	20%
Medication Administration	Medication Administration	20%
Documentation principles/practices	Documentation, quality assurance, and legal implication for nursing practice	10%
Documentation of current CPR certification prior to beginning precepted clinical experience	Documentation of current CPR certification prior to beginning precepted clinical learning experience	NA
Supervised clinical experience providing precepted clinical experience	Supervised clinical experience providing direct patient care (minimum of 80 hours)	80 hours
Documentation of successful completion of Didactic Content of the Refresher Course	Documentation of successful completion of Didactic Content of the Refresher Course	NA

Each content area must offer a 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 Essential 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 review can be performed by an RN Preceptor for RN learners and an RN Preceptor or LVN Preceptor for LVN learners.

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 direct 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 assigned to the learner during the 80 hours of clinical learning experiences, the Board recommends that

one preceptor for each learner is preferred. The use of one preceptor provides greater opportunity to observe and evaluate any weaknesses or need for immediate remediation as the refresher nurse progresses throughout the experience.

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 for the six-month temporary permit.

Other Models of Nurse Refresher Programs:

North Carolina Registered Nurse Refresher Program:

The North Carolina Area Health Education Center (NC AHEC) RN Refresher Program offers an active program to help nurses re-enter the workforce (Schuler & Wagner, 2019). This program was developed in response to House Bill 320 (1989) that the University of North Carolina, the NC AHEC, and the North Carolina Board of Nursing develop an RN refresher program. Through partnerships and collaboration, the program was established and in 1992 was extended for statewide access.

The program was designed for a five-year evaluation with the most current evaluation and revision completed in 2015 with extensive updates to ensure currency. The 2015 curriculum consists of 24 online modules that reflect modern nursing practice. The program has rolling admissions with an enrollment in 2015 of 140 participants. The theory course is approved for 140 contact hours and the precepted clinical practicum provides an additional 160 hours. The clinical learning experiences are secured by the NC AHEC regional sites and must be approved by the NC Board of Nursing. Continuing education units are awarded upon completion. It was reported that more than 110 RNs complete the program each year and about 70% of the graduates return to the nursing workforce.

In addition to the stated goal of updating the NRC content, another goal was to transition the 2015 NRC to a course to be delivered completely online. This program is now offered to RNs in the state of North Carolina, the country, and English speakers across the world. Researchers identified the value of allowing sufficient time for design and implementation and the importance of engaging stakeholders early in the evaluation stage. Surveys to course graduates revealed positive outcomes. The course proved to be an asset for employers who could hire experienced nurses who had successfully completed a structured NRC. Further, survey outcomes identified a reduced time for new employee orientation. The NC AHEC RN Refresher Program is one strategy that could facilitate the return of veteran nurses in an efficient and cost-effective manner to address the nursing workforce shortage (Schuler & Wagner, 2019).

Arizona Registered Nurse Refresher Courses

In 2004, the Arizona Board of Nursing (AZBON) instituted a minimum practice requirement mandating that all nurses either practice nursing for 960 hours in the preceding five years or complete a Board approved NRC. Randolph (2013) published the results of a survey designed to

gather evidence that the AZBON refresher course regulations were both sufficient and relevant. This research was undertaken to meet the requirements of the NCSBN Institute of Regulatory Excellence Fellowship Program.

A longitudinal study was designed to compare specific characteristics of nurses who completed NRCs (RCNs) and upon completion in 2006 or 2007 to a reference group of RNs (RRNs) who renewed licenses between 2007 and 2011. The research compared the following elements between the RCNs and RRNs: demographic features; licensure renewal rates in 2010 and 2011; clinical settings; clinical areas; and time worked per week, month, and year.

Randolph identified that NRCs should focus on basic medical-surgical concepts and provide clinical learning experiences in both acute care and nonacute care settings. Since the RCNs were employed primarily in diverse settings providing direct patient care to specialty populations, an NRC should offer didactic and clinical experiences in the following arenas: community health, emergency departments, outpatient areas, and specialty settings.

Analysis of the cost of preparing a reentry nurse compared to the cost of preparing a new graduate nurse revealed educating the reentry nurse is by far a cost-effective measure. Overall, the study supported public policies that would encourage nurses to complete an NRC prior to reentering the workforce.

Refresher Courses in Texas:

In Fall 2022, an online survey was distributed to all Board approved Texas professional nursing education programs to collect data about the numbers of colleges/universities offering NRCs. The first question, "Does your college/university currently offer a Nurse Refresher Course?" brought a total of 96 responses; eight programs or 8.33% stated they offer NRCs while 88 programs or 91.67% stated they do not. Of the eight positive responses, seven or 87.50% indicated the course is currently active. Of the 84 programs responding to the question about the possibility of offering an NRC in the future, 71 programs or 84.52% stated although they do not currently offer an NRC, the program would be interested in doing so in the future if a demonstrated need from the community arose. The respondents explained that their priority is to ensure student and program success on the Next Generation NCLEX.

University of Texas Health Science Center – San Antonio RN Refresher Course

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 (Borgfeld, 2014). The course now has two enrollment cohorts per year, in spring and fall.

According to Course Coordinator Colonel Kimberly Cox, MS, RN, NE-BC, 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 eight hours and can be completed in one day, and the clinical learning component is 80 hours.

The minimum enrollment goal is 10 learners annually, although 10 learners per semester is the ideal. COVID-19 significantly impacted enrollment; the university had a hold on precepted practicums with MD Anderson during the peak times of the global pandemic. The greatest

challenge for refresher courses is securing affiliation agreements with clinical facilities throughout the state.

In 2021, the total number of nurses completing one, two, or all three components of the NRC is 16, whereas in 2022, 14 nurses completed one or more sections of the NRC.

Collin College Nursing Refresher Course

Collin College in McKinney, Texas, offers an LVN Refresher Course and an RN Refresher Course. The intention of the courses is to enable nurses to reeducate and develop their knowledge bases, nursing skills, and confidence in practice by reviewing current technology, equipment, nursing trends and practices, and legalities.

The RN Refresher is designed for inactive RNs returning to active practice and covers current professional nursing practice as related to the clinical areas of medical-surgical, maternal-child, mental health, and community nursing care. The LVN Refresher is designed for inactive LVN/LPN nurses returning to active practice. Students will complete 80 hours of online didactic training, two days of skills training, and 80 hours of face-to-face clinical learning experiences.

Learners are required to complete the entire course (didactic content, skills lab activities, and clinical learning experiences) upon enrollment. The annual enrollment goal is 45 individuals per year to be admitted in three cohorts. In 2021, 39 learners completed the course, whereas in 2022, 24 learners completed the course.

Professional Healthcare Education Service, Inc. (PHES) Nurse Refresher Course

PHES, a private provider of Nurse Refresher Courses, began offering NRCs in 2001, and now conducts them in Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, San Marcos, and Texarkana. According to PHES Course Director, Yvette Cheeks, MSN, RN, a targeted assessment is accomplished upon the nurse learner's admission to the course to ensure learning plans are individualized.

Ms. Cheeks set forth that clinical placements are challenging to obtain, requiring copious amounts of paperwork. A new concern arose after the global pandemic due to mandated COVID-19 vaccines in that refresher nurses were unable/unwilling to receive vaccines required by the clinical sites. Therefore, prospective enrollees were not able to participate in the 80 hours of clinical learning experiences required to complete the NRC.

Enrollment data show that in 2021, 73 learners completed the course, while in 2022, 85 learners completed the course. Successes have been realized with several sites recruiting and employing the refresher nurses.

Perry & Associates Healthcare Education Nurse Refresher Course

Carolyn Perry, BSN, RN, CRRN, Owner/Director of Perry & Associates Healthcare Education has provided NRCs since 2016; however, Ms. Perry suspended the program in 2021 due to clinical sites not accepting refresher nurses based on COVID-19 restrictions. In 2019, seven learners completed the course; in 2020, three learners completed the course; and in 2021, one learner completed the course.

ANG Associated Nurses Group Refresher Course

ANG in Dallas, Texas, Founder/Owner Felicia Edoghotu, MHA, MSN, RN, began offering NRCs in late 2019 with one course completer. Enrollment numbers since that time have increased as follows: in 2020, two learners completed the course; in 2021, five learners completed the course; and in 2022, 10 learners completed the course.

Discussion:

Hawley & Foley (2004) reported that providing effective refresher programs offers an opportunity to increase the nursing workforce by calling on the human resources already available. While some states require the refresher program includes a standard curriculum and specific expectations, Texas requirements are less stringent and may not result in the same outcomes for the three options (refresher program, extensive orientation, or courses in a nursing program).

The anticipated outcome for nurses completing an NRC is they will be fully integrated into the culture of the current nursing workforce. The NRC participants are adult learners; therefore, these individuals desire a structured, interactive, and nurturing learning environment. Further, it is critical that the participants be welcomed as part of the decision-making process when identifying specific learning needs and planning, implementing, and evaluating learning experiences. The NRC cohorts most likely will be comprised of learners of varying ages, as well as learners with differences in educational backgrounds, levels of licensure, and professional experiences (Hammer & Craig, 2008).

With the projected nursing shortage in the future, it may be prudent to review the current process to determine if it will serve the needs in the future. It may challenge an NRC co-ordinator to address the varying needs of diverse learners to ensure the learning experiences are designed and delivered to assist all learners to be successful (Hammer & Craig, 2008).

Cundall et al. (2004) set forth that nurses who complete an NRC would experience increased confidence and personal comfort in their professional life. Further, these nurses would be offered a greater variety of employment opportunities.

Pros of Current Method:

- Flexibility allows for choice.

Cons of Current Method:

- There is no assurance that all paths lead to similar outcomes.
- The current process does not require regular evaluation of the effectiveness of the programs.
- There is no process or plan for updating content.

This report is for information purposes only, but Board Staff welcome discussion by Board members.

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