

## **Talking Points Pertaining to the 2013 NCLEX-RN® Passing Standard**

Every three years, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN®) conducts a practice analysis for entry-level registered nurse (RN) licensure. Based on the results of the practice analysis, NCSBN® makes appropriate changes to the National Council Licensure Examination for RNs (NCLEX-RN®) and establishes a passing standard based on the new test plan. The passing standard represents minimum assessed competency for safe and effective entry level practice. These steps are necessary to help ensure that the NCLEX-RN Examination continues to reflect current nursing practice and that nurses who pass the NCLEX-RN Examination will continue to meet minimal levels of nursing competence.

### **1. What is the new passing standard?**

- The passing standard will be revised from the current -0.16 logits to 0.00 logit beginning April 1, 2013, with the implementation of the 2013® NCLEX-RN Test Plan.
- The passing standard of 0.00 logit will be in effect from April 1, 2013 to March 31, 2016.

### **2. How does standard setting on the NCLEX® relate to public protection?**

- NCSBN's mission is to promote regulatory excellence for patient safety and public protection. It is responsible for developing a licensure examination that reliably and validly assesses the minimal competency required to practice entry-level nursing safely and effectively. An appropriate and criterion-referenced passing standard is an important component of a psychometrically sound examination; it ensures that candidates who pass the NCLEX possess the necessary nursing knowledge for entry-level practice.

### **3. How was the new passing standard decided?**

- The NCSBN Board of Directors (BOD) considered the recommendation from an expert standard-setting panel, a variety of historical NCLEX performance data, as well as results from annual surveys to nursing employers and educators. An expert panel of 12 nurses representing all four NCSBN membership geographic areas, with a range of practice settings and levels of experience, took part in a three-day criterion-referenced standard setting workshop in September 2012. After considering entry-level RN practice requirements and reviewing a large number of operational NCLEX-RN items, members of this expert panel agreed that the passing standard should be raised in 2013 to meet the increasing demands on entry-level RNs.
- Additional information on the NCLEX standard-setting process is available online at [https://www.ncsbn.org/Setting\\_the\\_NCLEX\\_Passing\\_Standard.pdf](https://www.ncsbn.org/Setting_the_NCLEX_Passing_Standard.pdf).

### **4. How does the revised passing standard match up with current entry-level RN practice?**

- There is an increasing demand for entry-level nurses to advance the health of the nation and address the needs of today's ill and aging population. The increase in patient acuity and nursing responsibilities impacts entry-level nursing practice, placing greater demand on current entry-level nurses in comparison to their cohorts in the past. Considered in

conjunction with other available evidence, the NCSBN BOD established a more stringent NCLEX-RN passing standard to ensure that the exam continues to reliably and validly assess the candidate's ability to perform entry-level nurse practice.

- Below are a few examples that illustrate the change in entry-level nursing practice.
  - Perceived increase in patient acuity;
  - Decrease length of stay (LOS) in acute care facilities; increase LOS in homecare and community settings;
  - Decline in LOS may indicate that more patients are being discharged before their conditions have fully stabilized;
  - Increase in community admissions to homecare and long-term care facilities within the first week of being discharged from the hospital. Patients who are discharged home from acute care settings may still require additional care;
  - Increase in care in homecare/community settings;
  - Decrease in nursing care delivered in acute care settings;and
  - Increased emphasis on management of care activities.

**5. How are data obtained from the *2011 RN Practice Analysis: Linking the NCLEX-RN® Examination to Practice* utilized in the standard-setting process?**

- Results of the 2011 practice analysis study ([https://www.ncsbn.org/12\\_RN\\_Practice\\_Analysis\\_Vol53.pdf](https://www.ncsbn.org/12_RN_Practice_Analysis_Vol53.pdf)) provide a comprehensive picture of current entry-level RN practice.
- Consistent with trends observed in the last three RN practice analysis cycles totaling nine years, the 2011 study showed a continuing increase of current entry-level nurses in caring for patients with behavioral/emotional conditions and decrease in caring for the well, stabilized client with minor illnesses. The entry-level nursing care for clients with unstable chronic conditions is similar compared to previous entry-level cohorts.
- Results of the 2011 study also suggested that entry-level nurses are spending more time performing activities under the [Management of Care category](#). This category encompasses nursing tasks that enhance the care delivery setting in order to protect the client and healthcare personnel. In sum, entry-level nurses are caring for sicker clients in a greater number of health care settings and spending more time managing the care to improve client outcomes.

**6. [How were the opinions of employers and educators who work closely with candidates and entry-level nurses utilized in determining the passing standard?](#)**

- NCSBN annually surveys 1,750 nursing employers and educators to gain insight into the competence of RN candidates who recently graduated from a U.S. nursing program or recently began practicing as a registered nurse.
- According to annual survey results of the past three years, both nursing educators and employers have noted an increasing percentage of candidates who passed the NCLEX-RN, that they do not believe are competent to practice as entry-level nurses. The NCSBN BOD

considered the feedback from educators and employers, along with other available evidence, and recommended an increased NCLEX-RN passing standard.

**7. Will the NCLEX-RN become more difficult? [Or will there be more difficult items on the test?](#)**

- Since the passing standard will be raised, a higher level of ability will be required to pass the exam; however, the test wouldn't necessarily be harder. In a computerized adaptive test (CAT) such as the NCLEX, difficulty levels of test items are determined by the ability level of candidates. Each item administered on the exam is tailored to the candidate's ability level (<https://www.ncsbn.org/1216.htm>).
- Item distributions on the exam will change according to the 2013<sup>®</sup> NCLEX-RN Test Plan (<https://www.ncsbn.org/1287.htm>).

**8. How will candidates be impacted by the new passing standard?**

- Historically, there will be a slight drop in the pass rate immediately after a new passing standard is introduced. However, the pass rates generally return to previous levels after a year. Borderline and low performing candidates will most likely be affected. Pass rates of reference (first-time U.S.) candidates are historically the most stable, despite changes in passing standards.
- There is no reliable way to predict how the pass rates will be impacted by the new passing standard before April 2013. Additional pass rate information is available online at <https://www.ncsbn.org/1237.htm>.

**9. How can candidates prepare for the new passing standard?**

- Detailed information about the NCLEX-RN is available in the 2013<sup>®</sup> RN Test Plan (<https://www.ncsbn.org/1287.htm>). This detailed test plan contains job tasks relevant to entry-level RN practice. All items on the NCLEX-RN are directly related to these entry-level job tasks.