Just as completion of the academic requirements for the nurse practitioner (NP) was a well-defined process, there are multiple steps to complete after graduation and before entering into an employment arrangement. Completing the process in order will save you employment delays and frustration.

BEFORE GRADUATION
If you have not been keeping your paperwork organized during your academic program, it is never too late to start. You will need to keep copies of your course(s) descriptions, course number, number of credit hours, and year taken. Detailed copies of the course syllabi may also be required by an employer to validate that your academic program contained specific didactic content and clinical labs necessary to support procedural privilege requests. This information is also needed by the certification organizations American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) and the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners Certification Program (AANPCP).

Logs of your clinical hours (minimum of 500 hours) should also be well documented. These should include the site name, complete address, and name and credentials of the clinical preceptor. Some academic programs use software programs to record student clinical hours and procedures in a portfolio format. An example of a portfolio that you could develop is presented in Table 1.

A study plan for your certification examination should begin approximately 6 months before graduation. Consider various methods, such as reviewing course materials, studying in a group format, taking a review course, or listening to recordings—you know what works best for you. All of the credentialing Web sites list specific recommendations. Faculty in your academic program may also provide references for your certifying exam review.

APPLYING FOR CERTIFICATION EXAMINATION
In 46 states, NPs are required by law to have a Master’s degree, which allows them to take and pass a national certification examination. Table 2 outlines many of the existing certifying agencies and the specific NP specialties. Certification agencies recommend that you complete your application for testing 2-3 months before you plan to take the exam. Official transcripts will need to be submitted by the university in a separate, sealed envelope to the designated address. A photocopy of your current registered nurse (RN) license will also be required. Completing this information early will allow time for completion or correction of the application if needed.

Regardless of which certification agency you chose, review their complete application packet. Complete the checklist and review the application before submission, which may be paper or online. A copy of the application should be kept for your records. Instructions state that your name on the application should match the 2 forms of identification you will be presenting on the day of the exam at the testing center. An application fee is also required at the time of submission.

ANCC states that you will usually receive notification that your application was received within 2 weeks. Within 6 weeks, you will receive either your eligibility notice or a letter requesting additional information. The notice gives you 90 days in which to schedule and take your exam. AANP notifies the candidate once all appropriate documentation has been approved. At that time, you will receive notification from Professional Examination Services (PES) and an Authorization-To-Test (ATT) letter with instructions for testing. Candidates are given a 120-day window of opportunity to test, beginning with the ATT’s letter date. Candidates who do not test within this window will be required to re-submit their application with all applicable fees. See specific instructions for other certifying organizations in Table 2.

TESTING DAY
All exams are computer-based. You may apply for this test year round. When you are ready to take your
exam, use the Prometric Test Centers Directory\textsuperscript{3} to find the location nearest you. The Web site has specific information on the testing day. You should arrive 30 minutes before your scheduled testing time and bring the 2 forms of required identification that match your application; 1 form usually includes a photo. Also bring either your eligibility notice or your ATT letter.

Numbers of questions and time allotted will vary by certifying organization. Time until receipt of results also varies. The certifying agency may or may not send verification to your state of passage or

Table 1. Portfolio Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal Documents</th>
<th>Education/Publications/Awards</th>
<th>Certification/Licensure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Statement regarding goals and philosophy, and clinical interests</td>
<td>Grade transcripts</td>
<td>Copy of certification certificate as nurse practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample cover letter</td>
<td>Graduation diploma (copy)</td>
<td>Copy of prescriptive authority documentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum vitae</td>
<td>Procedural logs- Typhon logs – documenting training</td>
<td>RN and NP nursing license – copy from Web site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resume</td>
<td>Copies of academic course outlines/syllabus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional letters of reference – may be from faculty</td>
<td>Abstract from capstone project or thesis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photo identification</td>
<td>Continuing education certificates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Documentation of awards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Copies of articles or reports you have written</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Publications – university newsletters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Appropriate continuing education courses</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. National Certifying Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Web Address</th>
<th>Certification Exams Offered</th>
<th>Educational Requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academy of Nurse Practitioners Certification Program</td>
<td><a href="http://www.aanpcerti%5Ctextsuperscript%7Bf%7Dcation.org">www.aanpcerti\textsuperscript{f}cation.org</a></td>
<td>Adult, family, adult-gerontology primary care nurse practitioners</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Midwifery Certification Board</td>
<td><a href="http://www.amcbmidwife.org">www.amcbmidwife.org</a></td>
<td>Nurse midwife</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Nurses Credentialing Center</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nursecredentialing.org">www.nursecredentialing.org</a></td>
<td>Acute care, adult, adult-gerontology acute and primary care, adult and family psych-mental health emergency, family, gerontology, pediatric, and school nurse practitioners</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Certification Corporation (formerly NAACOG)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.nccnet.org">www.nccnet.org</a></td>
<td>Women’s health care and neonatal nurse practitioners</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation</td>
<td><a href="http://www.oncc.org">www.oncc.org</a></td>
<td>Oncology nurse practitioner</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pediatric Nursing Certification Board (formerly the National Board of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners and Associates)</td>
<td><a href="http://www.pncb.org">www.pncb.org</a></td>
<td>Acute and primary care pediatric nurse practitioner</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
failure. Therefore, it behooves applicants to examine the agency’s Web site for this information.

APPLICATION FOR LICENSURE
Individual state law governs the specific criteria necessary for licensure. Once you have successfully completed your certification boards, you may submit your application to the state Board of Nursing (BON) for your NP license. Please refer to the specifics on each state’s BON Web site for detailed instructions. Most states have an application packet available online for submission. There are instructions for completion and listings of the required materials to submit with the application. They require the official documentation directly from the certifying organization and verification of a graduate degree sent directly to the BON from the educational institution. You receive a specific license to practice as an NP with a corresponding license number. This process is considered valid when the license number appears on the BON Web site, much like your original RN license.

Recommendation for signing your signature is as follows. First after your legal name should be your degree (MSN, PhD, DNP), followed by your nursing license (RN), then your nursing certification (ACNP-BC, CNP, FNP-BC), and finally any other certifications (CCRN [Certified Critical Care Nurse], CHFN [Certified Heart Failure Nurse]).

PRESCRIPTIVE AUTHORITY
NPs may prescribe medications in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The level of physician involvement in prescribing is defined by individual state laws. In 13 states, NPs have explicit legal authority to prescribe with no requirements for physician involvement. In 33 states, NPs have explicit legal authority to prescribe but must have a collaborative relationship with a specific physician. In states like Michigan and Illinois, the collaborating physician delegates prescriptive authority to the NP. In other states, such as New York, if you satisfy all requirements for certification as an NP, you are authorized to issue prescriptions. However, in other states, like Ohio, you must also apply for a specific certificate to prescribe. States such as California issue what is called a furnishing number.

NPs should refer to the state’s BON Web site for specific guidelines regulating prescribing. An application fee is required. All prescriptive authority requirements include completion of an approved, graduate-level pharmacology course. This usually equates to 45 contact hours. This course is required to be completed within the 2-3 year period before requesting prescriptive authority. Your collaborating physician must be listed on your application.

Once approved, you will receive a corresponding license number. This number also appears on the BON’s Web site. You may not begin prescribing until this number appears on the site or you have received the official notification. The prescriptive authority may be in the form of a permit or externship until specific clinical prescribing requirements are completed. This number must be displayed on all prescriptions written by the NP.

Controlled Substances
In 49 states and the District of Columbia, NPs may prescribe controlled substances. The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), part of the US Department of Justice, regulates licensing for controlled substances. After completing your state licensure requirements, you may submit an application to prescribe controlled substances to the DEA. A DEA number must be displayed on all prescriptions written by an NP.

Individual practitioners should be aware that they must also have applied for the necessary state-level prescriptive authority first. Some states (eg, Pennsylvania) require a separate state-level application for prescribing controlled substances, sometimes referred to as a state Controlled Dangerous Substance (CDS) number. The DEA number is federally issued and can be granted in lieu of meeting the state requirements. The DEA does not supersede the state requirements for prescribing. The DEA number is necessary for prescribing controlled substances only and requires renewal every 3 years.

COLLABORATIVE AGREEMENTS
All states define the level of physician involvement that is required in NP practice. The most common form of physician involvement is some type of collaborative arrangement (CA). Thirty states require a CA. Other states define the level of involvement...
as supervisory. Still some states, such as New York, require written protocols texts that include provisions for case management, diagnosis, and treatment of pathology in the specialty area.\(^5\)

Many NPs are required to establish a CA before initiating practice with a physician. It must be drafted and signed by both parties before the first day of employment. This is not the same as an employment contract. Individuals should refer to the BON Web site for specific requirements. Some common elements in CAs include provisions for referral and consultation, resolution of disagreements between the NP and the collaborating physician, quality assurance provisions for review of charts and prescriptions, and procedures for coverage of either the NP or the collaborating physician. Most states include copies of sample documents. There are also sites that list sample documents at no charge. (eg, Ohio Board of Nursing\(^9\) and Model Standard Care Arrangement—Mercy Health\(^10\)).

CAs are required to be reviewed and updated at predetermined time intervals. Some states require the document to be filed with the state, while others require it to be kept on site where the NP practices. You will need an employer address and phone number for this document.

**CONCLUSION**

Once you have secured your license as an NP, prescriptive authority or furnishing number, CDS and DEA numbers, you will want to keep a list of these numbers and their renewal dates. CAs also require specified review dates. Although many agencies will notify you when your renewal date is approaching, you have the ultimate responsibility to complete the necessary requirements and submit the renewal applications. NPs cannot practice 1 day beyond the expiration date of their license. Most importantly, if you have relocated, notify all of these agencies so your renewal notices can be sent to the appropriate address. Agencies such as the DEA do not forward your renewal letter if it is returned.

Graduation from your academic institution represents the completion of 1 process and the beginning of another. There are many steps to complete before initiating employment. Being familiar with these steps will make the transition from student to licensed practitioner smoother. Knowing what references and resources are available will help you make the transition to this new and exciting role.

**References**


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