Confidentiality of NCLEX Examination Content

Overview

The National Council of State Boards of Nursing, Inc. (NCSBN®) is a non-profit organization that is comprised of the boards of nursing in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and four U.S. territories – American Samoa, Guam, Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The boards of nursing were established by state governments to protect the public’s health by overseeing and ensuring the safe practice of nursing. The mission of NCSBN is to provide leadership to advance regulatory excellence for public protection. The purpose of NCSBN is to provide an organization through which boards of nursing act and counsel together on matters of common interest and concern affecting the public health; this includes the development of licensing examinations in nursing.

NCSBN develops two licensure examinations, the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (NCLEX-RN®) and the National Council Licensure Examination for Practical Nurses (NCLEX-PN®) that are used by member boards of nursing to assist in making licensure decisions. In order to obtain a license to practice nursing in the U.S. and its jurisdictions, each candidate must pass the NCLEX-RN® or NCLEX-PN® Examination.

NCLEX Confidentiality

Before a candidate begins the NCLEX examination, he/she must agree to NCSBN’s terms of confidentiality. The “NCLEX Confidentiality Agreement” states that a candidate “agrees that he/she will not divulge any items, including response options, on this examination to any individual or entity.” Additionally, the candidate must
understand that the unauthorized possession, reproduction, or disclosure of any examination materials, including the nature or content of examination items, before, during, or after the examination is in violation of law. In brief, each candidate must agree that he/she will not disclose the content of examination items before, during, or after the examination. It is possible that a candidate might disclose examination content and ultimately violate their “NCLEX Confidentiality Agreement” by talking with classmates about examination content, sharing examination content with faculty members and test preparation instructors, and reconstructing and/or compiling examination content to share with others. Disclosing NCLEX examination content to others, whether intentional or unintentional, can compromise the integrity of the examination results, which places the public at risk of having licensed yet incompetent nurses caring for them. The results of the NCLEX are based upon the candidate being able to use his/her own knowledge to answer each item on the examination and not use information about exam content gained from illegitimate sources. Candidates who violate the terms of the confidentiality agreement, such as NCSBN’s intellectual property rights, may be subject to several penalties.

In addition to the above violation of confidentiality, in the 2008 NCLEX® Candidate Bulletin there is a list of “Grounds for Dismissal or Cancellation of Results” with a definition of behaviors that are considered to be “irregular” and may constitute cancellation of exam results. Some of these rules include: not bringing any study aids (textbooks, notebooks, review course notes, etc.) to the exam; accessing study aids or seeking assistance of a third party in answering items, in person or by any electronic devices (i.e. cell phone) after the exam has begun; copying, removing, or attempting to
remove, exam items/responses or notes about the exam. For additional information about candidate behaviors to be avoided visit www.ncsbn.org and click on the 2008 NCLEX® Candidate Bulletin.

Moreover, the NCLEX Security tip line telephone number is located in the 2008 NCLEX® Candidate Bulletin. Suspicious or unprofessional behavior may be reported at 1.866.496.2539 or by e-mail at pvtestsecurity@pearsonvue.com.

Sharing NCLEX examination content is illegal, unethical and unprofessional. It is critical that nurse educators model the appropriate professional and ethical behavior by not asking students about their examination content, and, if students volunteer information, ask them to stop. You can assist NCSBN defend the integrity of nursing licenses by making your students and colleagues aware of the importance of maintaining the confidentiality of the NCLEX examination.