

**CSC EXAM ELIGIBILITY**  
Cardiac Surgery Nursing Subspecialty

Staff Review: March 2022  
Board Approved: May 2022  
Last Revised: March 2022

**1.0 POLICY**

**Exam Eligibility**

Current, unencumbered licensure as an RN or APRN the U.S.<sup>1</sup> is required. An unencumbered license is not currently being subjected to formal discipline by the Board of Nursing in the state(s) in which the applicant is practicing and has no provisions or conditions that limit the nurse's practice.<sup>2</sup>

- Provisions or conditions may include, but are not limited to, direct supervision of practice, drug administration limitations and/or practice area exclusions.
- Documentation of all provisions and conditions from the board or its designee must be reviewed prior to approval for testing.
- Candidates and CSC certificants must notify AACN Certification Corporation (Cert Corp) within 30 days if any provisions or conditions are placed on their RN or APRN license(s).

Have met one of the following clinical practice requirement options:

1. Practice as an RN or APRN for 1,750 hours in direct care of acutely/critically ill patients during the previous 2 years, with 875 of those hours accrued in the most recent year preceding application. Of these 1,750 hours, 875 must be in the care of acutely/critically ill adult cardiac surgery patients during the first 48 hours postoperatively.  
**or**
2. Practice as an RN or APRN for at least 5 years with a minimum of 2,000 hours in direct care of acutely/critically ill adult patients, with 144 of those hours accrued in the most recent year preceding application. Of those 2,000 hours, 1,000 must be in the care of adult cardiac surgery patients during the first 48 hours postoperatively.

Orientation hours spent shadowing/working with another nurse who is the one with the patient assignment *cannot* be counted toward clinical hours for CSC eligibility; however, orientation hours during which you are the assigned nurse providing direct care to acutely/critically ill adult

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<sup>1</sup> Includes District of Columbia and U.S. territories of Guam, Virgin Islands, American Samoa and Northern Mariana Islands. Puerto Rico is not an NCSBN member and, therefore, not included.

<sup>2</sup> If a restriction (temporary or permanent) is placed on an RN or APRN license for an incident that occurred prior to obtaining the license, AACN Certification Corporation (AACN Cert Corp) will evaluate such an occurrence on a case-by-case basis to determine if exam eligibility requirements are met.

cardiac surgery patients may be counted.

Nurses serving as manager, educator (in-service or academic), APRN or preceptor may apply their hours spent supervising nursing students or nurses at the bedside. Nurses in these roles must be actively involved in caring for cardiac and/or cardiac surgery patients; for example, demonstrating how to measure pulmonary artery pressures or supervising a new employee or student nurse performing a procedure.

Eligible practice hours for CSC exam eligibility must be completed in a U.S.-based<sup>3</sup> or Canada-based facility or in a facility determined to be comparable to the U.S. standard of acute/critical care nursing practice, as evidenced by Magnet® designation or Joint Commission International accreditation. Practice hours outside the U.S. may qualify; determination will be made upon review by the Internal Review Panel.<sup>4</sup>

A current clinical nursing specialty certification, to which the CSC credential will be attached, is required. The clinical nursing specialty certification must:

1. involve direct care of adult patients, and
2. be nationally accredited by the NCCA (National Commission for Certifying Agencies) or the ABSNC (Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification), and
3. test beyond clinical judgment to include key nursing competencies of professional caring and ethical practice as outlined in the Synergy Model for Patient Care.

Examples of acceptable clinical nursing certifications include, but are not limited to, CCRN, CCRN-E, PCCN, ACNPC, ACNPC-AG, CCNS, ACCNS-AG, CNOR, CRNFA, CPAN, etc.

## **2.0 PROCEDURES**

The name and contact information of a professional associate must be given for verification of eligibility. If a certificant is selected for audit, this associate may be contacted to verify that the candidate met the practice hour requirement. A professional associate is defined as a clinical supervisor or professional associate (RN or physician) with whom the certificant works (need not be CSC-certified).

Applicants may request a review of their certification eligibility at any time. The review process will be conducted by the staff of AACN Cert Corp. The appeal process is conducted by the AACN Cert Corp Appeals Panel. Applicants determined to be ineligible for the CSC exam will have their application fee refunded within 30 days of determination.

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<sup>3</sup> Includes District of Columbia and U.S. territories of Guam, Virgin Islands, American Samoa and Northern Mariana Islands. Puerto Rico (PR) is not an NCSBN member and, therefore, not included. The exception would be if a PR facility is a VA, carries Magnet® designation or is Joint Commission International accredited.

<sup>4</sup> The Internal Review Panel has determined that Australia practice aligns with U.S. practice.

AACN Cert Corp may adopt additional eligibility requirements at its sole discretion. Any such requirements will be designed to establish, for purposes of CSC certification, the adequacy of a candidate's knowledge and experience in caring for acutely/critically ill cardiac surgery patients.

### **3.0 PURPOSE AND RATIONALE**

CSC is a nursing subspecialty designed for specialty certified nurses who provide direct care to acutely/critically ill adult cardiac surgery patients within the first 48 hours postoperatively. Specialty nurses interested in this subspecialty certification may work in areas such as cardiothoracic surgery, cardiovascular surgery and postanesthesia care units.

The CSC exam is based on a study of practice, also known as a job analysis. The job analysis, conducted at least every five years, validates the knowledge, skills and abilities required for safe and effective practice as an RN or APRN in direct care of acutely/critically ill adult cardiac surgical patients within the first 48 hours postoperatively.

The test plan, which provides an outline of exam content, is developed by an expert CSC panel based on the results of the study of practice. The organizing framework for all AACN Cert Corp exams is the AACN Synergy Model for Patient Care, with CSC focusing exclusively on the clinical judgment component. A current clinical nursing specialty certification is required to ensure key nursing competencies of professional caring and ethical practice as outlined in the Synergy Model have been tested.

Clinical practice requirements have been validated by subject matter experts and approved by the AACN Cert Corp Board of Directors. The required hours of clinical practice correspond to the third stage of competence in Benner's Stages of Clinical Competence. CSC certification denotes to the public those practitioners who possess a distinct and clearly defined body of knowledge called cardiac nursing.

An unencumbered U.S. license as RN or APRN is required to validate that the nurse is following accepted legal nursing practice in compliance with State Board of Nursing requirements.