



Policies Regarding the Certificates of Added Qualifications Program

Purpose. In support of a commitment to promote the health and safety of the public, NCCPA will offer Certificates of Added Qualifications to physician assistants who demonstrate that they meet professional standards of knowledge, skills, and experience.

Eligibility.

NCCPA shall confer Certificates of Added Qualifications based on the following eligibility criteria:

- **PA-C Requirement:** Only those physician assistants who are currently certified by the NCCPA with the designation of "PA-C" are eligible to earn or maintain Certificates of Added Qualifications.
- **Licensure Requirement:** Only those physician assistants who possess either (1) a valid, unrestricted license to practice as a physician assistant in at least one jurisdiction in the United States or its territories or (2) unrestricted privileges to practice as a physician assistant for a government agency are eligible to earn or maintain Certificates of Added Qualifications. Further, if more than one physician assistant license is held, all licenses must be reported to NCCPA and must be valid and unrestricted. Should a license become restricted at any time, the NCCPA shall undertake disciplinary proceedings, which may result in revocation of the physician assistant's Certificates of Added Qualifications and/or eligibility for same.

A physician assistant's license or privileges to practice shall be deemed "restricted" for purposes of this policy if, as a result of final action by a state, government agency or other legally-constituted medical board (hereafter "the Authority"), the physician assistant license or privileges have been:

1. Revoked, or the physician assistant has surrendered their license or privileges in lieu of further disciplinary action;
2. Suspended for a specified period of time and the suspension is still in effect;
3. Placed on probation and the probationary period has not expired;
4. Made subject to special conditions or requirements which are still in effect (including, but not limited to, supervision, chaperoning during the examination of patients, limitation on prescribing or dispensing authority, and additional training beyond that required of all physician assistants for the maintenance of licensure), and regardless of whether such conditions or requirements were imposed by order of the Authority or are the result of a voluntary agreement between the physician assistant and the Authority.

Physician assistants are responsible for notifying NCCPA of any restrictions placed on any license held or on privileges to practice, and such notification must occur within 30 days of a final action taken by the Authority.

- Specialty Continuing Medical Education (CME) Requirement: Applicants must complete a minimum of 75 credits of Category 1 CME focused on their specialty within the six-year period ending on the date they apply for the Certificate of Added Qualifications exam. Further, at least 25 of those CME credits must be earned within two years prior to the date of application for the Certificate of Added Qualifications exam. The specific requirements for CME for each Certificate of Added Qualifications program are provided in the *Appendix for Certificates of Added Qualifications*.
- Specialty Experience Requirement: Applicants must have gained at least 2000 to 4000 hours of experience working as a physician assistant in the specialty within six years prior to the date they attest to NCCPA that the experience requirement has been satisfied. The specific requirements for experience for each Certificate of Added Qualifications program are provided in the *Appendix for Certificates of Added Qualifications*.
- Specialty Procedure/Patient Case Requirements: Applicants must be able to apply the appropriate knowledge and skills needed for practice in the specialty, as described in the *Appendix for Certificates of Added Qualifications*. In support of this requirement, each applicant must provide attestation from a collaborating physician or senior/lead physician assistant who works in the specialty and is familiar with the physician assistant's practice and experience. Physicians and physician assistants who are directors of post graduate physician assistant programs may complete the attestation for PAs who are enrolled in or have completed their post graduate program. The attestation may be submitted before taking the exam or no later than 90 days after the CAQ applicant has been notified of scores from the CAQ exam.
- Certificate of Added Qualifications Examination Requirement: Upon completion of all other eligibility requirements described above, with the exception of the specialty procedure/patient case requirements attestation that may be submitted after taking the exam, applicants may submit an application for the Certificate of Added Qualifications exam. Applicants must obtain a passing score on the examination to receive the Certificate of Added Qualifications. Unsuccessful examinees may apply for a subsequent exam but will have to continue to meet the Certificate of Added Qualifications eligibility requirements described above at the time of their next application.
- Time Constraint Requirement: Applicants will have six years to obtain the Certificate of Added Qualifications from the date they initiate the process to the date they complete all requirements. The process is initiated by submitting an administrative fee and satisfying any one of the following requirements: Specialty CME Requirement, Specialty Experience Requirement, or the Specialty Procedures/Patient Case Requirements.

Certificate of Added Qualifications Term. Upon successful completion of all requirements, the physician assistant will be granted a Certificate of Added Qualifications for a period of ten years.

MAINTENANCE OF CERTIFICATES OF ADDED QUALIFICATIONS

Purpose. In support of its commitment to promote the health and safety of the public, NCCPA shall establish and maintain appropriate requirements for Certificate of Added Qualifications maintenance.

Requirements. In addition to continuing to meet current PA-C and licensure requirements, physician assistants must meet the following requirements to maintain Certificates of Added Qualifications:

- **Examination Requirement:** Physician assistants must pass the Certificate of Added Qualifications exam within three attempts prior to the expiration of the current Certificate of Added Qualifications cycle. If the exam has not been passed after the third attempt, the Certificate of Added Qualifications will be invalidated, and the physician assistant must regain the Certificate of Added Qualifications by meeting the initial eligibility requirements anew.
- **CME Requirement:** During each ten-year Certificate of Added Qualifications cycle, physician assistants must earn and log at least 125 credits of Category 1 CME focused on the specialty. Those CME credits may also be used to satisfy the PA-C certification maintenance requirements. Physician assistants must submit the credits prior to or at the time of their exam application.

Maintenance Term for Certificates of Added Qualifications. At the end of the ten-year Certificate of Added Qualifications cycle, physician assistants who have satisfied all maintenance requirements will be recertified for the next ten-year cycle. The Certificate of Added Qualifications cycle is independent of the PA-C cycle.

The ten-year cycle will be reset based on the year the examination is passed for physician assistants who take the Certificate of Added Qualifications exam prior to the tenth year of the cycle.

Auditing. To ensure the reliability and accuracy of the Certificate of Added Qualifications and maintenance processes, NCCPA may audit the requirements of physician assistants who have applied for Certificate of Added Qualifications or have successfully completed the Certificate of Added Qualifications process. Physician assistants who refuse to submit to an audit may be subject to loss of the Certificate of Added Qualifications and/or other disciplinary actions as deemed appropriate by NCCPA and in accordance with the *Policy and Procedures for PA Disciplinary Matters*.

Loss of Eligibility. If a physician assistant loses eligibility for a Certificate of Added Qualifications after submitting the application and fee, the physician assistant will be deemed ineligible and restricted from registering for the exam or from maintenance of Certificate of Added Qualifications activity, or will be withdrawn from the examination or maintenance activity if registration has already been processed.

Financial Requirements. Applicants must fulfill all outstanding financial debts and any applicable fees to NCCPA prior to becoming eligible to apply for a Certificate of Added Qualifications or for Certificate of Added Qualifications maintenance.

If an applicant loses their eligibility for a Certificate of Added Qualifications or Certificate of Added Qualifications maintenance after submitting the respective application and fees or if, at any time, it is determined that a physician assistant provided incorrect eligibility information on any NCCPA application, the physician assistant shall forfeit all fees.

Exam Scores. Scores from the Certificate of Added Qualifications exams will be released to examinees after NCCPA has completed all scoring and validation processes. Physician assistants may not register to repeat an examination if they have scores pending from a previous administration of the same examination. If an applicant is deemed ineligible for the Certificate of Added Qualifications after taking the exam but prior to the release of exam scores, the exam scores will be invalidated and not reported to the applicant.

Disciplinary Review. Nothing in this policy shall limit or prevent NCCPA from imposing sanctions as set forth in its *Policy and Procedures for PA Disciplinary Matters*.

PROCESS FOR REGAINING A CERTIFICATE OF ADDED QUALIFICATIONS

Physician assistants who lose a CAQ due to the expiration of their PA-C certification may reinstate their CAQ as long as the original or most recent CAQ expiration date has not passed and the PA meets the licensure/federal privilege requirements for the CAQ program. The CAQ will be reinstated for the period of time remaining in the CAQ maintenance period. Physician assistants who lose a CAQ for any other reason, including NCCPA disciplinary actions, must begin the Certificate of Added Qualifications process anew by meeting the eligibility requirements for initial Certificate of Added Qualifications, including passing the Certificate of Added Qualifications examination or may seek a reinstatement of their CAQ when they regain certification by filing a request for an exception to policy, as long as the CAQ expiration date has not passed and the PAs meets the licensure/federal privilege requirements for the CAQ program.

APPENDIX FOR THE CERTIFICATE OF ADDED QUALIFICATIONS PROGRAM

Additional Requirements by Specialty Program

Certificate of Added Qualifications in Cardiovascular/Thoracic Surgery

Additional CME Requirements. None specified.

CME Recommendations. Applicants should complete CME activities that encompass knowledge of post-op critical care management and knowledge of surgical management of coronary artery disease, congenital heart disease, thoracic disease, central and peripheral vascular disease, and Advanced Cardiac Life Support.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of physician assistants seeking Certificates of Added Qualifications in cardiovascular/thoracic surgery is a minimum of

4,000 hours (the equivalent of two years of full-time practice) of practice in cardiovascular and/or cardiothoracic surgery.

Specialty Procedures and Patient Cases. Periodically NCCPA shall convene panels of PAs and physicians practicing in this specialty to review and amend the list of specialty procedures and patient cases included on the form for the physician attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

*Approved Board of Directors, July 2010
Revised November 2019*

Certificate of Added Qualifications in Dermatology

Additional CME Requirements. Within the required 75 credits of specialty-focused Category 1 CME earned within the six-year period ending on the date applicants apply for the Certificate of Added Qualifications exam applicants are required to complete a dermoscopy course for a minimum of 5 Category I CME credits.

CME Recommendations. It is recommended that applicants complete a comprehensive CME program in dermatology. CME hours earned as part of such a comprehensive dermatology program will count towards the 75 specialty-focused credit requirement for the prior six-year period and the 25 specialty-focused credit requirement for the prior two-year period only if completed during those time frames.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of physician assistants seeking Certificates of Added Qualifications in dermatology is a minimum of 4,000 hours (the equivalent of two years of full-time practice) of practice providing dermatologic care to patients.

Specialty Procedures and Patient Cases. Periodically NCCPA shall convene panels of PAs and physicians practicing in this specialty to review and amend the list of specialty procedures and patient cases included on the form for the attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

Approved Board of Directors, November 2021

Certificate of Added Qualifications in Emergency Medicine

Additional CME Requirements. None specified.

CME Recommendations. Applicants should complete a comprehensive emergency medicine course that reflects the guidelines set forth in the most current version of the *Model of the Clinical Practice of Emergency Medicine*. Applicants should also complete the following courses:

- Pediatric Advanced Life Support or Advanced Pediatric Life Support
- Advanced Cardiac Life Support
- Advanced Trauma Life Support
- Airway course

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of physician assistants seeking Certificates of Added Qualifications in emergency medicine is a minimum of 3,000 hours (the equivalent of 18 months of full-time practice).

Specialty Procedures and Patient Cases. Periodically NCCPA shall convene panels of PAs and physicians practicing in this specialty to review and amend the list of specialty procedures and patient cases included on the form for the physician attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

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Certificate of Added Qualifications in Hospital Medicine

Additional CME Requirements. Within the required 75 credits of specialty-focused Category I CME, applicants are required to complete a CME activity related to risk management.

CME Recommendations: Applicants should complete an Advanced Cardiac Life Support course.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of physician assistants seeking Certificates of Added Qualifications in hospital medicine is a minimum of 3,000 hours (the equivalent of 18 months of full-time practice) in practice that primarily involves the management of hospitalized adult patients.

Specialty Procedures and Patient Cases. Periodically NCCPA shall convene panels of PAs and physicians practicing in this specialty to review and amend the list of specialty procedures and patient cases included on the form for the physician attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

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Certificate of Added Qualifications in Nephrology

Additional CME Requirements. None specified.

CME Recommendations. Applicants should complete CME activities that encompass knowledge of the evaluation of the kidney function, urinalysis, radiological assessment of renal disease, the kidney in systemic disease, chronic kidney disease, peritoneal dialysis, hemodialysis, medications and the kidney, the kidney in special circumstances (i.e., pediatric patients, pregnancy, and/or aging), hypertension, billing and coding, and kidney transplantation. Applicants should complete an Advanced Cardiac Life Support course.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of physician assistants seeking Certificates of Added Qualifications in nephrology is a minimum of 4,000 hours (the equivalent of two years of full-time practice) in practice as a physician assistant, including at least 2,000 hours (the equivalent of one year of full-time practice) in nephrology.

Specialty Procedures and Patient Cases. Periodically NCCPA shall convene panels of PAs and physicians practicing in this specialty to review and amend the list of specialty procedures and

patient cases included on the form for the physician attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

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Certificate of Added Qualifications in Orthopaedic Surgery

Additional CME Requirements. None specified.

CME Recommendations. Applicants should complete CME activities that are focused in orthopaedic surgery and at the level appropriate for a physician assistant practicing in the specialty. Applicants should complete an Advanced Cardiac Life Support course.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of physician assistants seeking Certificates of Added Qualifications in orthopaedic surgery is 4,000 hours (the equivalent of two years of full-time practice).

Specialty Procedures and Patient Cases. Periodically NCCPA shall convene panels of PAs and physicians practicing in this specialty to review and amend the list of specialty procedures and patient cases included on the form for the physician attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

*Approved Board of Directors, July 2010
Revised November 2019*

Certificate of Added Qualifications in Palliative Medicine and Hospice Care

Additional CME Requirements. Within the required 75 credits of specialty-focused Category 1 CME, applicants are required to complete a CME activity related to the safe and effective prescribing of opioids.

CME Recommendations. Applicants should complete CME activities related to the following topics:

- Experiential training in advanced communication skills to include motivational interviewing
- Complex symptom management in patients with and without substance use disorder
- Advanced Care Planning
- CME sessions offered by palliative medicine and hospice care organizations
- Certificate courses, graduate level courses, fellowship programs, etc.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of physician assistants seeking Certificates of Added Qualifications in palliative medicine and hospice care is a minimum of 2,000 hours (the equivalent of one year of full-time practice) of practice providing palliative medicine and/or hospice care to patients with serious and life-threatening illnesses and advanced/serious chronic health.

Specialty Procedures and Patient Cases. Periodically NCCPA shall convene panels of PAs and physicians practicing in this specialty to review and amend the list of specialty procedures and patient cases included on the form for the attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

Approved Board of Directors, August 2021

Certificate of Added Qualifications in Pediatrics

Additional CME Requirements. None specified.

CME Recommendations. Applicants should complete CME activities that are focused in pediatrics and at the level appropriate for a physician assistant practicing in the specialty. Applicants should complete a Pediatric Advanced Life Support course or a Neonatal Resuscitation Program course.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of physician assistants seeking Certificates of Added Qualifications in pediatrics is 4,000 hours (the equivalent of two years of full-time practice).

Specialty Procedures and Patient Cases. Periodically NCCPA shall convene panels of PAs and physicians practicing in this specialty to review and amend the list of specialty procedures and patient cases included on the form for the physician attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

*Approved Board of Directors, March 2013
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