

TENNESSEE BOARD OF NURSING
CONTINUED COMPETENCE REQUIREMENTS

The Tennessee legislature passed the following law in 1998 mandating continued competence for registered and practical nurses:

By January 1, 2002, the board of nursing shall implement a plan to assure continuing competence of licensees, using educationally sound methods to promote learning and assess outcomes pertinent to contemporary standards of nursing practice.

To implement this law, the Board adopted rules which you are advised to review in their entirety. Please go to tennessee.gov/health, click on licensing, health professional boards, nursing, regulations. The citation for the rules is 1000-1-.14(3) for registered nurses and 1000-2-.14(3) for licensed practical nurses.

The rules define continued competence as "the application of integrated nursing knowledge and the interpersonal, decision-making, psychomotor, communication, and leadership skills expected for the nursing practice role within the context of the public health, safety, and welfare." In other words continued competence means the application of nursing knowledge and skills expected for practice in order to protect the public from harm.

Next, the rules set out the standards of nursing competence. These standards enumerate very clearly the basic expectations for practice as a registered nurse and a licensed practical nurse in Tennessee. The standards of competence are separated into standards related to the nurse's responsibility to implement the nursing process and standards related to the nurse's responsibilities as a member of the nursing profession. Take time to compare and contrast the standards for RNs and LPNs.

Now to the question, "How do I demonstrate competence to satisfy these rules?" First, nurses who practice full or part time will attest on their renewal application beginning January 1, 2004, that they have maintained a file (e.g. paper, electronic) documenting evidence of continued competence. The licensee must select at least two of fifteen items from a list of options. The list is both broad and self-explanatory so those nurses who practice in a variety of settings should be able to easily find options that are reasonable and convenient. Advanced practice nurses must maintain current national certification to meet competency requirements.

Acceptable proof of competence shall include two of the following:

1. satisfactory employer evaluation;
2. satisfactory peer evaluation;
3. satisfactory patient/client relationship;
4. contract renewal or re-appointment;
5. written self evaluation based on the standards of competence;
6. initial or continuing national certification (Advanced Practice Nurses must select this option);
7. identification of two goals and a plan to demonstrate competency for these goals;
8. volunteer work in a position using nursing knowledge, skills and ability or service relevant to nursing on a board or agency;
9. participation in the education of nursing students in an approved school of nursing;
10. five contact hours of continuing education;
11. published an article relevant to nursing;
12. completed a two week nursing refresher course;
13. completed a two week comprehensive orientation program;
14. two hours of nursing credit in a nursing program; and
15. successfully retaken the national licensure examination.

The options for those nurses who have either not practiced nursing full or part time in a five year period or who plan not to work and wish to maintain competence are more prescriptive and are listed in a separate section of the rules. These rules should help nurses maintain competence on the front end and lessen the time needed to prepare for going back into practice when that time arises.

Lastly, it is important to note that each licensee must maintain evidence of compliance for four years from when the requirements are completed. This documentation must be produced for inspection and verification within thirty days of a written request by the board. Note: We must have your current address so that we can reach you! Failure to either complete the continued competence activities or to falsely certify completion may subject the nurse's license to disciplinary action.

The Board's intent is for every licensee to be able to demonstrate continued competency in a flexible and easy manner. Please refer to our web site for further information about continued competence and other topics of interest to licensees.