NCCPA Initial Certification and the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE)

An Introduction to the PA-C® and PANCE
The Physician Assistant-Certified® (PA-C®) designation is a mark of professional accomplishment, indicating the achievement and maintenance of established levels of knowledge and clinical skills. Issued by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA), the PA-C® designation is widely recognized within the medical professions and beyond. In fact, all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories have decided to rely on NCCPA certification as one of the criteria for licensure or regulation of physician assistants.

To attain the PA-C® designation, you must pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination (PANCE) after completing the requirements of your PA program. PANCE is a computer-based, multiple-choice exam that assesses medical and surgical knowledge and is administered at Pearson VUE Professional testing centers.

To be eligible for PANCE, you must graduate and complete all requirements for graduation from a physician assistant program accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant (ARC-PA).

After passing PANCE, you will be NCCPA certified entitling you to use the PA-C® designation.

To maintain NCCPA certification, you must follow a process that involves documentation of continuing medical education (CME) and—in nine or ten years—successful completion of a recertification exam. You’ll receive more details about certification maintenance after you pass PANCE.

Limitations on Eligibility: The Six-Years-Six-Attempts Rule
Individuals who have never been certified and who graduated from an ARC-PA accredited physician assistant program on or after January 1, 2003, will be eligible to take PANCE for up to six years after completing the requirements for graduation from that program. During that six-year period, PANCE may be taken a total of six times. When either the six attempts or six years are exhausted, whichever occurs sooner, the individual loses eligibility to take PANCE. The only way to establish new eligibility is to complete an unabridged ARC-PA accredited physician assistant educational program again.

Exam Registration
Approximately three months prior to your expected graduation date, your PA Program will provide your eligibility information to the NCCPA. Ninety (90) days prior to the expected graduation/completion date received by NCCPA, you’ll be able to register for PANCE and submit an application and $475 exam fee online at NCCPA Connect (www.nccpa.net).

NCCPA complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and also offers special accommodations when testing, for qualified examinees with medical conditions that may be temporary or are not otherwise covered by the ADA.

When registering for the PANCE, please consider the following requirements:

- The earliest date you’ll be able to take the exam is seven days after your program completion/graduation (provided your program director has confirmed your graduation). This date will be reflected on your exam acknowledgement.
- You have 180 days from the beginning of your exam timeframe to the end of your timeframe in which to take the exam. These dates will be reflected on your exam acknowledgement.
  
  Example: If your expected graduation date is September 1, 2015, the first day you could test would be September 8, 2015. Therefore your exam timeframe would be September 8, 2015 through March 6, 2015.
- If there’s any chance that you won’t complete your PA program requirements on time, wait until you are confident of your program completion/graduation date prior to registering for the exam.
- If you register for PANCE after NCCPA has received your confirmation of completion, your 180 timeframe to take the exam will begin the day your application and payment are complete.
- You will maintain eligibility to take the PANCE to be certified for six years after your PA Program graduation date and may take PANCE up to six times during that six-year period.
- You may only take PANCE once in any 90-day period or three times in a calendar year.
- You must apply using your name as shown on your driver’s license.
After You Apply
Three to five days after NCCPA receives your application and exam fee and the application process is complete, you will receive an exam acknowledgement via e-mail with information about test-day procedures and scheduling your exam. You can always sign in to your personal certification record at www.nccpa.net to view the status of your application. Your exam acknowledgment will also include the dates during which you may schedule your exam.

If your program does not verify your completion on the expected graduation date in NCCPA records, your application for the PANCE will be withdrawn. Once we receive confirmation of your graduation, NCCPA will reinstate your exam application and notify you. You would then receive a new exam acknowledgement reflecting your new exam timeframe.

PANCE Procedures
• You must complete the exam during the 180 day timeframe shown on your exam acknowledgement. To obtain your preferred test center and date, **it is in your best interest to schedule a test date as soon as possible after receiving your exam acknowledgement.**

• When you arrive at the test center, you must present two forms of valid and current ID: One ID must contain a permanently affixed photo with your printed name and signature and the second ID must contain your printed name and signature. You will not be admitted to the test if the names on your ID do not match your name as listed in NCCPA’s record. To see NCCPA’S Testing ID and Name Policy go to http://www.nccpa.net/ID.aspx. Notify NCCPA immediately if your name must be changed in our records.

• If you arrive at the test center without the required ID you will not be permitted to take the exam. If you are not admitted to test, you will forfeit your entire application fee and must re-apply and pay for the PANCE.

• Once you begin the exam, you may not cancel or reschedule, and no refund of any portion of the exam fee or credit toward future exam fees will be provided.

• If you are unable to complete the exam due to an extenuating circumstance and wish to file an examination you must contact NCCPA in writing within three business days of taking the exam.

• Test center staff members monitor all testing sessions for NCCPA exams. Failure to follow the instructions of the test center staff during the exam may be deemed irregular behavior. Examinees observed engaging in possible violation of test administration rules or other forms of irregular behavior during an exam will not necessarily be told of the observation at the time of the exam.

• You are not permitted to make written notes of or to record in any way the content of an exam. Except as instructed by test center staff, the only writing or recording permitted by examinees while in the testing room is on the center’s non-removable, erasable, laminated note boards.

Scores
Scores are received approximately two weeks after your exam date. NCCPA will notify you via e-mail as soon as your exam results have been received and posted to your personal record at www.nccpa.net.

Information Disclosure
• NCCPA maintains a strict policy regarding the release of registration, certification and exam information to third parties. Upon the written or oral request of a third party, NCCPA will verify your current certification status, your NCCPA ID number and the date of your initial certification or recertification. If you have met the certification maintenance requirements for the current cycle and are awaiting a new certificate, NCCPA will also disclose that you have met the requirements and the expiration date of your new certificate.

• NCCPA will also release your exam information to your program director and to state licensing agencies.

• NCCPA will also disclose information that is required to be in compliance with state and federal laws, court orders and military deployment information requirements and will report adverse disciplinary decisions to the Federation of State Medical Boards, any state licensing authority with which the physician assistant holds a license to practice as a physician assistant and other interested parties.

• Any additional information requested by a third party will only be released with your written and signed authorization.

For additional information, please visit www.nccpa.net or contact us at 678-417-8100.