

# When the Green Light Turns Red

Why RNCB made the difficult decision to end a  
certification program.

Karen Nason, CAE  
Executive Director  
Rehabilitation Nursing Certification Board

# A brief story of the CRRN-A

(Advanced practice certification for  
rehabilitation nurses)



Background:

Since 1984, RNCB had the “basic” CRRN exam.

Successful, strong, well-respected.

Assumed we had a robust program we could build on.



Mid-1990s - growing recognition of the advanced practice nurse.

The Association of Rehabilitation Nurses developed the scope of practice/standards and core curriculum for advanced rehabilitation nursing practice.

RNCB began its inquiry about the interest in an advanced level rehabilitation nursing certification.



## How was the inquiry conducted?

Focus group at national conference

Survey of Master's-prepared ARN members

Job analysis survey

Identified early goal -- program that would be acceptable to state boards of nursing as they implemented requirements for advanced practice nurses.



RNCB aimed to be progressive and on the leading edge of certification.

There were some passionate, vocal advocates who were very proud of their advanced nursing role.

It was the right thing to do for advanced practice nurses in our specialty.



Decision to proceed included recognition that candidate volume would probably be low, in the 100-200 candidates per year range.

Advanced program should aim to be at least break-even within a few years.



RNCB also progressive in moving from pencil and paper to computer based testing in the late 1990s.

CRRN exam had previously been offered only on December 1 of each year.

Candidates had requested more flexibility so we were introducing year-round testing.



# 1997

First CRRN-A exam administered – 4 candidates.

The “basic” CRRN program saw its numbers fall from 2,340 exam candidates in 1996 to 373 in 1997.



Implemented year-round testing for candidate convenience. Test at any time, not a one-time exam period. CBT also introduced in 1997.

*Lesson learned* – People procrastinate – they need deadlines!



RNCB had announced the plan to require a minimum of a BSN to sit for the basic CRRN exam by 2000.

By 1997, ARN membership numbers dropped with many (former) members reporting they had heard that a BSN was required to be a member of the organization!



## Other Environmental Changes

Changes in reimbursement for rehabilitation services in the 1990's also negatively impacted the profession.

CMS looking for savings, some rehabilitation facilities had to close.



## Lessons Learned

Being too progressive by introducing too many changes at the same time.

Again - nurses (people) need deadlines.

## Meanwhile Back with the CRRN-A Program

1998 – 38 exam candidates  
1999 – 15 exam candidates  
2000 – 15 exam candidates  
2001 – 7 exam candidates



Confusion on roles of advanced practice – CNS, requirement of a Master's Degree in Nursing, states were also trying to determine their stance on roles and advanced practice.

The Master's Degree in Nursing requirement was challenging. Some nurses had a master's degrees (in public health, for example) but not a MSN. They were not eligible for the CRRN-A as it was then defined.



RNCB is now questioning the viability of the program.

2002 survey of Master's-prepared rehab nurses:

- 75% did not plan to take the exam in the next 1-3 years
- 16% said they were ineligible to take the CRRN-A exam (no MSN degree)



2003

Only 47 CRRN-A's.

Limited recognition from states (only 3 confirmed).

2002 survey indicated continued low interest in the program without the tangible benefit such as state recognition.

RNCB made the difficult decision to terminate the program.



June 2004

The CRRN-A exam was offered for the last time.

3 candidates sat for the exam.



What could have/should have been anticipated?



After hearing this case study, what would you do differently if you were to launch a new program?



## Resources

Lenora G. Knapp, PhD and Joan E. Knapp, PhD (2002) *The Business of Certification: A Comprehensive Guide to Developing a Successful Program*, American Society of Association Executives

Lenora G. Knapp, PhD and Joan E. Knapp, PhD (2002) *The Business of Certification Toolkit*, American Society of Association Executives

Joan Knapp, PhD; Lynn Anderson, PhD; and Cheryl Wild, PhD (2009) *Certification: The ICE Handbook*, Institute for Credentialing Excellence

[www.knappinternational.com/things\\_weve\\_written](http://www.knappinternational.com/things_weve_written)

