



*Formerly the ABNS Accreditation Council*

## **ACCREDITATION PROCESS**

### **INSTRUCTIONS AND REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION**

**Revised February 2006; March 2008; December 2009; February 2010; October 2010; May 2011;  
Updated 2-2012**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC), formerly known as the ABNS Accreditation Council, defines certification as *the formal recognition of the specialized knowledge, skills, and experience demonstrated by the achievement of standards identified by a nursing specialty to promote optimal health outcomes*. The ultimate goal of professional certification is to assist consumers in making informed choices regarding their healthcare practitioners. To that end, ABSNC provides an accreditation process for specialty nursing certification programs(s). ABSNC accreditation signifies the compliance with rigorous standards for certification programs and is a further testament to the public of the high quality and credibility of an individual nurse's certification credential(s).

### **About Our History**

ABNS was incorporated in 1991, after a number of years of discussion and consensus building within the nursing profession. The Macy Foundation generously supported the process. Consensus building discussions resulted in the development of twelve standards for nursing certification programs. In 1996, ABNS formed a task force to review and strengthen the original standards. In addition, a rationale section was added to each standard. There was consensus among the ABNS Assembly to adopt 17 revised standards developed by the task force. In 1999, the ABNS Assembly revised the standard previously requiring the BSN degree as an eligibility criterion for test candidates. Shortly thereafter, ABNS restructured to create a membership organization with an autonomous accrediting body called the Accreditation Council.

In 2002, the ABNS Accreditation Council's total revision of the standards was completed and approved after the addition of two more standards related to continued compliance and quality improvement. In 2003, after further review of the Standards, the standard on continued compliance was eliminated and 18 standards remained. In 2004 the Standards were reordered; in addition, Standard 5 Public Representation was revised to require that the public member have voting privileges. In 2010 another in-depth review of the Standards was completed and revisions approved in March 2011. Substantive changes to the Standards included changes to Standard 5 regarding eligibility criteria/qualifications of Public Members; Standards 6 and 11 regarding requirements if offering Practice Exams; and Standard 17 regarding federal registration of an organization's certification mark(s).

In 2007 ABNS began a process for creating a separate and autonomous body to perform the accreditation function. In 2009, the ABNS Accreditation Council was renamed the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC) and a separate corporation was established.

ABNS members and non-members may seek accreditation of their certification program(s) for Registered Nurses. In addition, only organizations with an accredited certification program(s) are members of ABSNC and eligible to vote in elections for ABSNC board members and approve amendments to ABSNC Bylaws.

Members of the ABSNC Board of Directors are elected and represent organizations that have an accredited certification program(s).

The Accreditation Standards and the ABSNC Bylaws and Policy & Procedure Manual are posted on the ABNS/ABSNC website at [www.nursingcertification.org](http://www.nursingcertification.org) under the Accreditation Tab and may be downloaded.

## Accreditation Standards

ABSNC accreditation is based on documentation that demonstrates that a certification program(s) for a nursing specialty meets *all* of the standards of ABSNC. A standard is defined as “an authoritative principle or rule that provides a model or pattern of guidance.” Each standard is followed by a rationale that provides a full explanation of the meaning of the standard and its importance to ABSNC. The criteria that follow each rationale can be defined as the “basis for making judgements” as to whether the certification program meets the standard. Required documentation is listed for each standard. Reviewers will judge whether an application meets the criteria based on the documentation provided. To be eligible for accreditation, certifying organizations must provide *evidence* that *each* criterion is met. Compliance with *all* standards must be demonstrated in order for initial accreditation and reaccreditation to be granted.

**Initial accreditation applications must demonstrate compliance with the most current Accreditation Standards as posted under the Accreditation tab of the ABNS/ABSNC website. The Accreditation Standards available on the website always indicate the dates of the most recent revision and update. Because the time required to prepare an accreditation application can be lengthy, organizations are advised to periodically check the website in order to ensure that they are using the most current version of the Accreditation Standards. Because of the revisions made to the Standards in March 2011, organizations seeking reaccreditation should refer to the document, *Summary of March 2011 Revisions to ABSNC Standards and Effective Dates*, found under the Accreditation tab of the website.**

### When is an Organization Ready to Submit an Initial Accreditation Application?

In addition to being able to submit documentation of compliance with all of the required documentation for each standard, an applicant organization must have examination statistics data to report for at least one year of testing or for a minimum of 200 candidates, whichever occurs first.

## SUBMISSION OF A LETTER OF INTENT

An organization seeking *initial* accreditation from ABSNC will submit an electronic Letter of Intent to Submit three months prior to submission to the ABSNC office at [abns@nursingcertification.org](mailto:abns@nursingcertification.org).

## APPLICATION PROCESS

All application materials will be treated confidentially. Applicant information is shared among ABSNC board members and volunteer psychometricians only. No reviewer may disclose or release information contained in an application. After an application review is completed, one application will be retained by ABSNC. Notes in the possession of individual reviewers are destroyed. CDs will not be returned unless requested but instead are destroyed in a secure manner.

The application process is designed to allow the applicant organization to demonstrate that their certification program(s) meets each ABSNC Standard. Completion of the application is similar to a self-study in which the applicant organization assesses their certification program(s) and documents evidence of compliance with the ABSNC Standards.

The applicant organization may be contacted for additional information or clarification. If it is necessary to request additional material more than three times, the applicant organization must reapply and application fees paid again.

Applications for initial accreditation may be submitted at any time throughout the year. Each application will be individually evaluated by an ABSNC Review Team. Every effort is made to complete the application review and determination of accreditation status within 60 working days after receipt of an application. If additional materials are requested, review/approval time is increased.

Each Review Team makes their final recommendation to the ABSNC Board of Directors. Approval from two-thirds of ABSNC Board of Directors is required for accreditation approval.

### **GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS**

**Please note: Paper applications are not accepted. Accreditation applications must be submitted electronically on CDs as described below.** However, certifying organizations are encouraged to submit their applications in an electronic format any time prior to January 1, 2011.

The benefits of electronic submission over a paper submission include a significant decrease in expense related to copying information, purchasing folders and dividers, and mailing four copies of the information to ABSNC. In addition, the CD is stored more easily by the applicant; CDs and electronic records are easy to replace and update when submitting subsequent reaccreditation applications. Finally, in keeping with many organizations' commitment to "going green," submissions on CDs eliminate the need to copy hundreds of pages of paper.

The applicant organization is responsible for all expenses related to shipping of ABSNC materials.

The electronic application must be submitted to the ABSNC office as noted below. Notify the ABSNC office prior to sending an application and use a carrier with tracking capabilities such as the USPS, FedEx, UPS. Feel free to contact Bonnie Niebuhr, ABSNC Chief Executive Officer, with any questions at 330-995-9172, 330-995-9743 (fax), or email [abns@nursingcertification.org](mailto:abns@nursingcertification.org). Send the accreditation application to:

ABSNC  
610 Thornhill Lane  
Aurora, OH 44202  
330-995-9172

A non-refundable application fee must accompany any application, as described under the Fees section of this document. A check should be made payable to ABSNC.

When downloading the Standards document from the website ([www.nursingcertification.org](http://www.nursingcertification.org)) under the Accreditation tab, download the Standards document as a Word document so you can use it as described below.

### **Instructions for Submitting Accreditation Application on CD**

All information and documents must be submitted as PDF files and organized using the Adobe Acrobat Professional features of Combining Files in a PDF Package and Bookmarking. These features allow ABSNC Reviewers to easily evaluate each application.

In addition, the services of an outside resource (e.g., Office Depot, Staples, independent contractor) can be used to create files. ABSNC neither endorses nor recommends any particular resource or vendor. In addition, you may ask vendors or publishers to provide you with a PDF version of required publications.

The following instructions are provided to assist nursing certifying boards in developing and organizing the electronic application.

### **Procedure**

1. Thoroughly read the *Instructions for Submitting an Accreditation Application*.
2. Read the entire ABSNC Accreditation Standards document to determine the type and scope of information that must be provided to demonstrate compliance with each of the standards.
3. Organize information according to the instructions because each section of the application will become a separate PDF file within the document, labeled as follows.
  - a. Narrative Folder
    - (1) Overview
    - (2) Standard 1 (For each Standard, in the Narrative column, cite the Tab or Appendices for specific supportive documentation.
    - (3) Standard 2, etc.
  - b. Appendices Folder – includes publications/documents that you reference often throughout the application.
    - (1) Appendix A – Standards of Practice for Specialty
    - (2) Appendix B - Certification Handbook
    - (3) Appendix C - Recertification Handbook
    - (4) Appendix D - Bylaws
    - (5) Appendix E - Policy and Procedure Manual
    - (6) Appendix F - Testing Partner’s Policies & Procedures specific to your organization
    - (7) Appendix G - Item Writer’s Training Manual
    - (8) Appendix H - Certification Organization’s Annual Report from Testing Partner
    - (9) Appendix I - Testing Partner’s Chief Examiner’s Training Manual
    - (10) Appendix J - Testing Partner’s Manual for the Administration of Your Examination(s)
  - c. Tabs Folder – includes documentation to demonstrate compliance with a specific aspect of a standard
    - (1) Tab 1 - Table of Contents from *Core Curriculum*
    - (2) Tab 2 - Examples of information describing educational programs focused on specialty
    - (3) Tab 3 - Membership brochure from related specialty nursing membership organization

(4) Tab 4 – Job Description

4. Include a Table of Contents in each of the three folders.
5. Any information available in a hard copy format only must be scanned and saved as a PDF document. Place this PDF document in the appropriate PDF Folder.
6. The final set of PDF files (Narrative Folder, Appendices Folder, and Tab Folder) must be copied on to four separate CDs. Label each with the certifying board's name and the name of the certification program submitted for accreditation. For example, *West Certification Corporation Inc., Accreditation Application for Nursing Certification Program*. In addition, make four paper copies of the *Application for ABSNC Accreditation Cover Sheet* (the last sheet of this document) and include in the mailing.
7. The CDs of the application will not be returned to the submitting organization, unless the applicant organization indicates to do so. To have electronic files returned, please provide prepaid mailing information (e.g., envelopes with return address and postage affixed, or completed FedEx or UPS shipping forms). If no instructions are provided, reviewers will destroy the electronic files using a secure method. ABSNC retains one copy of the application for its records.

Further helpful information:

- The application and all supporting documentation must be organized in three electronic folders: one folder for Narrative, one folder for Appendices, and one folder for Tabs. Include a Table of Contents in the Narrative folder of the application as well as a listing of the documents demonstrating compliance in the front of the Appendices and Tabs folders. This will facilitate the review of submitted electronic materials.
- The *Narrative folder* contains a brief Overview of your Organization and the current ABSNC Standards document where you are to complete the description of how your organization meets each of the Standard Criteria in the space provided.

Prior to beginning the narrative portion of the Standard, provide a brief Overview of your organization. The purpose of this Overview is to provide the reader with a snapshot of your organization – making further reading of the narrative more understandable.

The Overview might include such information as the certification program(s) you are describing in the application and the related certification credential(s), what the certification credential acronym(s) mean, the number of certified individuals at the time of the application, the length of the certification period, a summary of options for recertification, a summary of the testing and/or management company that provides service, including their name, address, names/credentials of staff assigned, if applicable, names/credentials of certification staff, brief description of governance structure, for example, *A nine member Board of Directors comprised of eight RNs and one Consumer Representative, governs XX organization*, and a brief recap of the certifying organization's history.

The Standards document (a Word document) should be saved as a Word document and is designed so that the applicant organization can actually type the narrative portion in the column called **Narrative (Cite Tab or Appendix for Specific Supporting Documentation)**. In this narrative section, describe how you have met that particular requirement then tell us where to find the actual supporting documentation showing compliance with the Standard - reference a specific Tab or Appendices. For example, the list of Item Writers and their demographics might be found in Tab X, but your "Review and Appeal" policy would be found on page X of your Policy and Procedure Manual found in Appendix X. For example, unless otherwise noted, in the Narrative column simply say See Policy xyz, found in Tab, x.

- The *Appendices folder* contains those documents that you can continually reference rather than having to submit multiple copies of the same documents. For example, the Appendices folder would include your complete Policy and Procedure Manual, Bylaws, Candidate Handbook, Recertification Handbook, testing company's Proctor Manual, Item Writer's Manual, etc.
- The *Tabs folder* contains all other supporting documents.

## **ACCREDITATION PERIOD**

ABSNC accreditation status is granted for a period of 5 years, beginning with the date of approval. Accreditation status must be renewed annually with payment of the appropriate fees providing no major changes have been made to the accredited certification examination(s). Annual reports must be submitted to ABSNC confirming continuing compliance with Standards.

Organizations may seek reaccreditation every 5 years. A renewal notice is sent to accredited organizations 15 months and 12 months prior to the expiration of accreditation status. Applications must be submitted no later than six months prior to the expiration date. Expiration occurs on the first of the month.

## **RECOGNITION OF ACCREDITATION**

ABSNC recognizes accreditation of an organization's certification program(s) by providing a framed certificate and recognizing the organization at an ABNS Assembly meeting. The name of the organization and all accredited certification programs are also listed on the ABSNC website.

Organizations with accredited examination programs are encouraged to communicate this achievement by using the phrase, "The XYZ certification program is accredited by the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification, formerly known as the ABNS Accreditation Council" on its publications and other communication vehicles such as its website. ABSNC will email organizations the ABSNC logo art for use in its publications, if requested.

## **APPEAL OF ACCREDITATION DECISIONS**

In instances in which accreditation is not awarded, the applicant organization will be given specific reasons for the denial of accreditation. A copy of the ABSNC "Reconsideration and Appeal of Accreditation Decision" policy and procedure will accompany notice of denial of accreditation.

## FEES

### Application Fee

A non-refundable application fee, (check, payable to ABSNC), must be submitted along with the application and documentation. Applications submitted without the application fee will not be processed until the application fee is paid. ABNS Regular Member organizations benefit from reduced accreditation application fees. **The application fee for non-members is \$750 per certification program submitted. The fee for ABNS members is \$500 for 1 – 2 certification programs, and \$750 for 3 – 5 certification programs.**

Multiple certification programs must be submitted at the same time to obtain the reduced fees.

No more than 5 examination programs from the same organization will be reviewed in any three-month period.

### Shipping Fee

Please include your organization's Fed-Ex or UPS account number on the Cover Sheet, found on page 10 of these instructions. The applicant organization must provide ABSNC with a total of six Fed-Ex or UPS shipping slips. These slips are used to ship the applications to and from Review Team members.

### Annual Renewal Fees

Upon notification of approval of **initial** accreditation, the applicant organization will pay annual accreditation fees within 60 days of receipt of notification of approval. These fees are prorated based on the quarter in which the application is approved. An invoice will be sent to the organization by the ABSNC office.

Annual renewal fees are based upon a formula using per candidate numbers at year-end. The fees are \$0.30 for each of the first 25,000 certificants and \$0.10 for each certificant over 25,000. The accreditation fees are capped at \$12,000 per year. Fees for an organization's first accreditation are prorated depending on the time of year an application is submitted. The ABSNC fiscal year begins July 1.

For organizations submitting an application for **reaccreditation**, fees are paid annually as noted on the annual invoice sent by the ABSNC office.

### CHECK LIST FOR SUBMISSION OF ACCREDITATION APPLICATION

- Have you confirmed you have used the most current Accreditation Standards found on the ABNS/ABSNC website ([www.nursingcertification.org](http://www.nursingcertification.org)) under the ABSNC section?
- Have you prepared 4 CDs, each containing a complete application including PDFs of all materials to demonstrate compliance with the Standards?
- Have you included a table of contents for the narrative sections, a listing for each tab, (e.g., Tab 1 – Scope of Practice Statement, Tab 30 – List of Item Writers), and a listing for each document found in the Appendices, (e.g., Appendix 1 – Candidate Handbook, Appendix 3, Policy and Procedure Manual).
- Have you double-checked that each tab and appendix coincides correctly with the narrative to which it refers?
- Have you enclosed a check, payable to ABSNC, for the application fee?
- Have you completed the Application Cover Sheet as found on page 10 and enclosed a copy with *each* of the CDs?
- Have you included your organization's FedEx, UPS or other shipping account number on the Application Cover Sheet as well as provided six shipping forms?
- Have you notified the ABSNC office you are submitting your accreditation application prior to shipping?

**Application for ABSNC Accreditation**

**Cover Sheet**

Please check one:       Initial Accreditation       Re-accreditation

1. Name of Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

3. City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

4. Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Address and Telephone Number if different from above: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

8. Fed-Ex Account Number \_\_\_\_\_ or UPS Account Number \_\_\_\_\_

9. Title of certification program(s) being submitted for accreditation and credential(s) awarded:

10. Date application submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

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**For office use only**

Date received:

Date sent to Review Team:

Date additional information rec'd:

Date approved/not approved:

Fees received:

Date acknowledged:

Date additional information requested:

Date of email ballot to AC:

Date organization notified:

Certificate awarded:

(ABSNC Instructions for Submitting Accreditation Application – 2-2012)