

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 Board Certified PAs who demonstrate that they meet professional standards of knowledge, skills, and experience.

Eligibility.

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

- **PA-C Requirement:** Only those PAs who are currently board certified by the NCCPA with the designation of “PA-C” are eligible to earn or maintain Certificates of Added Qualifications. In no case may a PA who has lost NCCPA board certification for any reason, whether through expiration or revocation, also hold a Certificate of Added Qualifications unless and until the PA regains NCCPA board certification. NCCPA will issue a nondiscretionary one-year revocation of a PA’s Certificates of Added Qualifications and/or eligibility for Certificates of Added Qualifications in connection with issuance of a reportable Letter of Censure.
- **Licensure/ Authorization to Practice Requirement:** Only those PAs who possess either (1) a current, unrestricted license to practice as a PA in at least one jurisdiction in the United States or its territories or (2) unrestricted privileges to practice as a PA for a government agency or in a jurisdiction not requiring licensure are eligible to earn or maintain Certificates of Added Qualifications. Further, all current licenses and/or authorizations to practice as a PA must be reported to NCCPA and must be unrestricted. If a license and/or authorization to practice of a PA seeking or holding a CAQ becomes restricted at any time, the NCCPA shall undertake disciplinary proceedings. In addition to any other sanction imposed by NCCPA under its *Policies and Procedures for PA Disciplinary Matters*, NCCPA will issue a nondiscretionary one-year revocation of the PA’s Certificates of Added Qualifications and/or eligibility for Certificates of Added Qualifications if the NCCPA disciplinary proceeding results in a reportable Letter of Censure.

A PA’s license or authorization 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 PA license or privileges have been:

1. Revoked, or the PA has surrendered their license or privileges in lieu of disciplinary action;
2. Suspended for a specified period of time and the suspension is no longer 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 regardless of whether such conditions or requirements were imposed by order of the Authority or are the result of a voluntary agreement between the PA and the Authority.

PAs 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 PA 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 Requirement:** 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 PA who works in the specialty and is familiar with the PA's practice and experience. Physicians and PAs who are directors of post graduate PA 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 requirement 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 must 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 Requirement.

Certificate of Added Qualifications Term. Upon successful completion of all requirements, the PA will be granted a Certificate of Added Qualifications for a period of ten years, provided the PA maintains current board certification by NCCPA during that period.

Last Reviewed: May 2026

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, PAs must meet the following requirements to maintain Certificates of Added Qualifications:

- **Examination Requirement:** PAs must pass the Certificate of Added Qualifications exam within three attempts during the ninth or tenth year of their ten-year CAQ cycle. If the exam has not been passed after the third attempt or by the end of the 10th year, the Certificate of Added Qualifications will be invalidated, and the PA 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, PAs 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. PAs must submit the credits prior to or at the time of their exam application.

Maintenance Term for Certificates of Added Qualifications. PAs must complete the CAQ maintenance requirements prior to their CAQ expiration date. The Certificate of Added Qualifications cycle timing is independent of the timing of the PA-C cycle, except that the CAQ is only valid while the PA holds current board certification by NCCPA.

If a PA chooses to complete the exam component prior to the ninth year of the ten-year cycle, then the ten-year CAQ cycle will be reset based on the year the CAQ examination is passed.

Auditing. To ensure the reliability and accuracy of the Certificate of Added Qualifications and maintenance processes, NCCPA may audit the requirements of PAs who have applied for a Certificate of Added Qualifications or have successfully completed the Certificate of Added Qualifications process. PAs 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 PA loses eligibility for a Certificate of Added Qualifications after submitting the application and fee, the PA 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 PA provided incorrect eligibility information on any NCCPA application, the PA 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. PAs 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

PAs who have lost a Certificate of Added Qualifications due to the expiration of their PA-C board certification may reinstate their CAQ after they regain their NCCPA board certification as long as the original or most recent CAQ expiration date has not passed and the PA meets the licensure/authorization to practice requirements for the CAQ program at the time that they apply to reinstate their CAQ. PAs who have lost a Certificate of Added Qualifications due to NCCPA disciplinary revocation may reinstate their CAQ after a minimum of one year has elapsed since revocation of the CAQ, provided that the original or most recent CAQ expiration date has not passed and the PA meets the licensure/authorization to practice requirements for the CAQ program at the time that they apply to reinstate their CAQ. CAQs will be reinstated only for the period of time remaining in the CAQ maintenance period. Reinstatement of a CAQ is only available to PAs who are currently NCCPA board certified.

PAs cannot reinstate a CAQ if the original/most recent CAQ expiration date has passed. Instead, they 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.

Appendix for the Certificate of Added Qualifications Program *(in Alphabetical Order)*

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 PAs 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 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, applicants are required to complete a dermoscopy course for a minimum of 5 Category I CME credits.

CME Recommendations. Applicants should complete a comprehensive CME program in dermatology.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of PAs 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
Revised April 2022*

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 PAs 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 attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

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

Certificate of Added Qualifications in Geriatric Medicine

Additional CME Requirements. None specified

CME Recommendations. PAs applying for the Geriatric Medicine CAQ should complete their 75 Category I credits of CME activities related to the following topics (commonly referred to as the Geriatric 5 Ms®¹ as they apply to the older adult patient:

- Matters Most
- Medications
- Mind
- Mobility
- Multicomplexity

Experience Requirement. PAs seeking the Geriatric Medicine CAQ must meet the experience requirement as follows:

- PAs who specify Geriatric Medicine as their principal specialty must have a minimum of 2,000 hours of experience (the equivalent of one year of full-time practice) providing care to older adult patients.
- PAs who specify other principal specialties but focus their practice in providing care to older adult must have a minimum of 3,000 hours of experience (the equivalent of 18 months of full-time practice) providing care to the older 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 attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

Approved by Board of Directors, August 2025

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 PAs 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 attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

¹ Tinetti, M., Huang, A., & Molnar, F. (2017). The Geriatrics 5M's: A New Way of Communicating What We Do. Journal of the American Geriatrics Society, 65(9), 2115

Successful completion of an NCCPA-approved supervised PA post-graduate program (e.g., residency, fellowship, clinically focused academic degree) can be used to replace the above listed non-exam requirements.

Revised May 2025

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 PAs 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 PA, 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 attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

Approved Board of Directors, July 2010

Revised November 2019

Certificate of Added Qualifications in Obstetrics and Gynecology

Additional CME Requirements. None specified.

CME Recommendations. It is recommended that PAs choose a variety of CME activities that cover the breadth and depth of obstetrical and gynecological medical, surgery, and preventive practice throughout the lifespan.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of PAs seeking Certificates of Added Qualifications in Obstetrics and Gynecology is a minimum of 2,000 hours (the equivalent of one year of full-time experience) of practice providing obstetrical and gynecologic care.

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 2022

Certificate of Added Qualifications in Occupational Medicine

Additional CME Requirements. None specified.

CME Recommendations. Applicants are recommended to complete CME activities that are sponsored or offered by organizations focused on occupational medicine and activities that are related to the regulations and guidelines applicable to occupational medicine.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of PAs seeking Certificates of Added Qualifications in occupational medicine is 2,000 hours (the equivalent of one year 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 attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

Approved Board of Directors, May 2023

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 PA practicing in the specialty. Applicants should complete an Advanced Cardiac Life Support course.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of PAs 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 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 PAs 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 PA 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 PAs 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 attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

*Approved Board of Directors, March 2013
Revised November 2019*

Certificate of Added Qualifications in Psychiatry

Additional CME Requirements. None specified.

CME Recommendations. Applicants should complete CME activities that are focused in psychiatry and at the level appropriate for a PA practicing in the specialty.

Experience Requirement. The specific term of experience required of PAs seeking Certificates of Added Qualifications in psychiatry is a minimum of 2,000 hours (the equivalent of one year 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 attestation of the PA's knowledge and skills.

Successful completion of an NCCPA-approved supervised PA post-graduate program (e.g., residency, fellowship, clinically focused academic degree) can be used to replace the above listed non-exam requirements.

Approved Board of Directors, July 2010
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