

# The CNRN Exam: Thinking Outside Your Box

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A common misconception about the Certified Neuroscience Registered Nurse (CNRN) examination is that it should be a test that reflects your expertise in your practice setting. Quite to the contrary, the CNRN exam is meant to discern between nurses who have a much broader knowledge that goes far beyond any one practice setting or any particular population and nurses who have merely become experts in their practice setting or with a particular population. In fact, if you consider that nursing care is given from conception to death and might be provided in a variety of settings, some of them not even identified as a healthcare facility (in a home or the community), then you can appreciate the importance of creating a test that reflects the broad variety of settings where care is delivered and the people receiving treatment. Nursing care is delivered not only to people with illnesses or injuries but also to people needing preventive healthcare (e.g., well child visits, yearly physical exams, community screenings, community educational programs). The nurses who deliver care at these various points across the lifespan or in these various traditional or nontraditional healthcare settings may not identify themselves as neuroscience nurses—but we do.

The American Association of Neuroscience Nurses (AANN) and American Board of Neuroscience Nursing (ABNN) define *neuroscience nurse* broadly, recognizing that a neuroscience nurse cares for persons across the human lifespan continuum and addresses both normal and abnormal neurological development, as well as injuries and illnesses. They provide nursing care in a variety of settings, educating and promoting normal development and dealing with the prevention of illness or injury, caring for patients and families during acute care treatment, and preventing secondary or tertiary injury. The neuroscience nurse also works with patients and families to promote reintegration into the community following an acute care stay.

You can now understand that to create a test that reflects how we define *neuroscience nursing care*, the ABNN test development committee must compile a wide variety of test questions to assess a nurse's knowledge across the human lifespan and over a wide variety of traditional and nontraditional healthcare settings, bearing in mind preventive care, well care, various types of acute care, and rehabilitative care. The 2005 role delineation study was administered to a broader group of practicing nurses than past role delineation studies and thus was able to capture a view of practice that validated ABNN's vision of neuroscience nursing. You will be seeing more questions across development and outside of traditional healthcare settings to reflect this broad conceptualization of the neuroscience nurse.

How can you best prepare for the broad scope of the CNRN exam? First, begin studying as far in advance of the test as you possibly can. Start by reading the most recent ABNN candidate handbook completely! It is the *only* source that can prepare you for what will be tested on the upcoming CNRN exam. Use the examination matrix provided in the handbook as a guide. Probably the most useful thing you can focus on is the anatomy and normal physiology of the entire nervous system and its related systems (e.g., vasculature, ventricle system, muscular system). Keep in mind differences that

## Pediatric Resources

- Dixon, S. D., & Stein, M. T. (2006). *Encounters with Children: Pediatric Behavior and Development* (4th ed.). Philadelphia: Mosby Elsevier.
- McLone, D. G. (2001). *Pediatric Neurosurgery: Surgery of the Developing Nervous System* (4th or subsequent edition). Philadelphia: Saunders.
- Menkes, J. H., & Sarnat, H. B. (2006). *Child Neurology*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins.
- Tomlinson, D., & Kline, N. E. (2005). *Pediatric Oncology Nursing: Advanced Clinical Handbook*. New York: Springer.
- Volpe, J. J. (2001). *Neurology of the Newborn* (4th or subsequent edition). Philadelphia: Saunders.
- Wesson, D. E. (2006). *Pediatric Trauma: Pathophysiology, Diagnosis, and Treatment*. New York: Taylor & Francis.

may be important to treating different age groups. When you begin to study the seven broad topics listed on the matrix, keep in mind that the question could cover a neonate, infant, child, young adult, or elderly adult. Use the left side of the matrix, which identifies nursing interventions, to think about developmental differences across the lifespan. Also understand development of the nervous system from conception to late life. We will not expect you to have extremely detailed information, but every neuroscience nurse should have broad concepts about development of the nervous system and its related systems. Studying this material and performing critical-thinking exercises will help you broaden how you conceptualize the information long term. Remember, you are not just studying for the CNRN exam, but to broaden your knowledge as a neuroscience nurse and to become a leader in neuroscience nursing. When members of other disciplines see that you have CNRN certification, they will expect that you have a broad knowledge in the area of neurosciences.

Past test takers have suggested that you use a wide variety of sources to study for the exam. Make sure you include references that address issues across the lifespan. We recognize that identifying good pediatric resources may be difficult, and so we would like to recommend some possible sources (see sidebar). You should be able to find these in a medical library. Keep in mind that most of these sources are put together by other disciplines that do not have the same focus as nursing. Ask yourself which nursing interventions would address the health issues discussed. Don't forget about articles that cover pediatric care or nervous system development in *Journal of Neuroscience Nursing*.

The CNRN exam is not an easy test! However, it is also not an unreasonable test. Those who study and prepare broadly for the exam will find that they are equipped for the questions they are asked. There is nothing more rewarding than finding out that you passed the CNRN exam. It announces your dedication to neuroscience nursing and your broad clinical expertise to your nursing colleagues, colleagues in other disciplines, and your patients and families! 