ACHPN Review Course - The ACHPN Examination - Overview, Test Taking Strategies, and Application

Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association

Disclosures
The presenters have no real or perceived conflicts of interest that relate to this presentation.

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Objectives
1. Describe the ACHPN® certification examination structure and overview of the content
2. Describe strategies for preparing for and taking the ACHPN® certification examination
ACHPN Examination Specifics

A. The examination lasts 3½ hours

B. 175 questions
   1. 150 questions are scored questions
      • They have equal weight towards your final score
   2. 25 questions are unscored questions
      • As trial questions, they have no value towards your final score
   3. There is no indication of which questions are scored questions or which are unscored questions

Overarching Principles of the ACHPN Examination

The examination requires the APRN to apply the nursing process – that is to assess, plan, intervene, and evaluate
• Scenarios represent care to patients and families at the advanced practice nursing level, which requires the APRN to gather a history, perform a physical examination, consider diagnostics, deliberate diagnoses and initiate a treatment plan
• The goal is maintaining optimal function, within the limits of the disease process
• Fear, communication barriers, economic issues, and cultural considerations are addressed within the questions

ACHPN Examination Content

The examination covers the umbrella of palliative care under which hospice sits. Palliative care embraces the care of the patient diagnosed with serious, chronic progressive, and life-limiting illness and their family beginning at diagnosis through advanced illness and end-of-life with hospice.

The examination covers the wide spectrum of conditions and illness trajectories; the evidence based practice supporting care of these conditions and illnesses; and care that may occur across all settings – the acute setting, the rehab setting, the long-term care setting, and the home. In addition, it is expected that the candidate understand the Medicare Hospice Benefit, specifically in terms in eligibility, levels of care, and criteria for various illnesses and conditions.

Examination question reflect a 2 year delay of test question development to appearance in the examination.
Population Focus of the ACHPN Examination

• The ACHPN examination focuses on the adult population age 18 and older.
• There is no pediatric content on the examination.
• The pediatric APRN needs to consider whether it is appropriate given their practice setting, whether it is within his or her graduate study and whether it would be helpful for their career.
• Future of a pediatric specific examination: The number of potential candidates for a pediatric specific examination is low, so one will not be developed as it would be cost prohibitive.

Consider Your Practice

• If you work in palliative care, consider the Medicare Hospice Benefit in terms of eligibility, levels of care, and how to care for people in non-acute settings using less high technological methods.
• If you work in long term care, consider the science of various conditions, illnesses, and diseases across the trajectory in particular practices such as in acute care, home care, and office-based care.
• If you work in hospice, consider the state of the science of various conditions, illnesses, and diseases across the trajectory from diagnosis to end-of-life using evidence-based practice.
• If you work in acute care, consider the advanced stages of illness and care in office-based care, long term care, home settings, and hospice settings.

Basis of Content

A. Questions linked to national job analysis and the activities of the APRN.
B. Utilize common practices, not specific to you, your setting, or region.
C. Each question is linked to a specific activity.
D. 3 categories of questions:
   1. 20% are recall: The ability to recall or recognize information.
   2. 60% are application: The ability to comprehend, relate, or apply knowledge.
   3. 20% are analysis: The ability to analyze and synthesize information, determine solutions, and/or evaluate the usefulness of a solution.
Overview of the Blueprint
A. 6 areas of content
B. Content focuses on APRN behaviors
C. This review course focuses on the nursing process and critical thinking to promote those behaviors

Content Outline
1. Clinical Judgment in Caring for Adult Patients and their Families – 34%
2. Scientific Knowledge (biomedical, clinical, and psychosocial-behavioral) – 23%
3. Evidence Based Practice, Quality Improvement, and Research – 11%
4. Education and Communication – 16%
5. Professionalism – 9%
6. Systems Based Practice – 7%

Examination Preparation
• Applicant should review the areas of content
• Percentage of questions is different for each area of content
• Highest percentage: Clinical Judgment (34%) and Scientific Knowledge (23%) – comprises 57% of the test
• Important to review the other areas since they combine to make up 43%
Examination Foundation

Suggest 2 years of clinical practice in palliative nursing as a hospice and/or palliative APRN

Eligibility requirement for the APRN examination

• Candidate must have worked as a CNS or NP in hospice and palliative care for one of the following prior to submission of the application:
  - At least 500 hours in the most recent 12 months
  - 1000 hours in the most recent 24 months

APRN Certification Statistics

Total who have earned the ACHPN® credential: 1017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Pass Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Scoring

• Test scores are reported as raw scores and scaled scores
• In the equating process, the minimum raw score (number of correctly answered questions) required to equal the scaled passing score of 75 is statistically adjusted (or equated)
• The candidate need not pass each section
Summary

• The HPCC ACHPN® Certification Examination has been validated by testing measures
• Questions created by hospice and palliative APRNs who have undergone training in test question development and have clinical experience
• Examination questions supported by references and evidence-based practice
• The examination is based on all aspects of APRN practice and necessitates that the APRN recalls information, analyzes information, and applies information in clinical situations
• The examination requires the applicant to study in all aspects of palliative care
• The examination specifics are available to all potential certificants on the HPCC website

Resources

Competencies for the Hospice and Palliative Advanced Practice Nurse 2nd Edition 2014

Core Curriculum for the Advanced Practice Hospice and Palliative Registered Nurse 2nd Edition 2013
HPNA Position Statements:

- Artificial Hydration and Nutrition in Advanced Illness
- Assuring High Quality in Palliative Care
- Legalization of Assisted Suicide
- Palliative Sedation
- Role of the Nurse when Hastened Death is Requested
- The Ethics of Opiate Use Within Palliative Care
- The Nurse’s Role in Advance Care Planning
- Withholding and /or Withdrawing Life Sustaining Therapies

Other Resources

HPNA Compendiums – HIV, Dementia, Heart Failure, Liver Disease, Pulmonary Disease, Renal Disease, and Neurological Disease

Palliative Nursing Manuals – Based on the National Consensus Guidelines
Other Resources


Review of Retired ACHPN® Exam Questions

Levels of Knowledge

• Recall
  • Information, facts, principles, process
• Application
  • Interpretation, use of knowledge in a clinical situation
• Analysis
  • Evaluation of data, problem solving, fitting pieces of data together
**Question Structure and Types**

- Each question has
  - **Stem:** statement of question or situation that provides the central problem or idea
  - **Distractors:** incorrect answers
  - **Key:** correct answer
- Question will require
  - Answering a direct question
  - Choosing the best response

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A 34-year-old man with a history of Stage IV lung cancer presents to an outpatient palliative care clinic complaining of new onset of abdominal pain. He reports the pain started 48 hours ago; is constant, sharp, and non-radiating; and is preventing him from sleeping. Which of the following information does the APRN need to obtain from the patient to complete his pain assessment?

A. Impact of symptom  
B. Frequency of symptom  
C. Chronology or sequence of symptom  
D. Alleviation or aggravation of symptom

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*Think about pain assessment and the process - history, pain rating, location, frequency, alleviating/aggravating symptoms. The question is asking the word to complete, so the last action.*
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Which of the following is an example of a pathologic grief response?
A. Agoraphobia
B. Somatization
C. Overreactivity
D. Hallucinations

The literature has debated the criteria for the dx of prolonged grief or complicated grief. What’s hard with this question is the time frame - does the question mean a pathological grief response a few months after the death or > 6mths - which is when the PGD diagnosis can be made.

If the death was recent - then all could be considered an example of ‘normal’ grief.
Bereaved individuals who avoid going out to certain places because it’s a reminder of their loss and therefore not true agoraphobia - the avoidance is more associated with their intense grief reaction not really a fear of places where escape may be difficult. If the person had a hx of agoraphobia, then grief could exacerbate it.
Which of the following is an example of a pathologic grief response?
A. Agoraphobia  
B. Somatization  
C. Overreactivity  
D. Hallucinations  
2D3  
1-RECALL  
REF: Ferrell and Coyle, 2006, p. 536-537

Which of the following is the BEST example of a quality assessment activity?
A. Develop symptom protocols based on literature review.  
B. Implement a learning module on pain management for all new nurses.  
C. Evaluate care paths intended to improve the quality of life of dying patients.  
D. Precept an advanced practice nursing student in a palliative care residency.

Consider what quality improvement is. There is an assessment process to determine quality of care. The question is asking about an activity.
Which of the following is the BEST example of a quality assessment activity?
A. Develop symptom protocols based on literature review.
B. Implement a learning module on pain management for all new nurses.
C. Evaluate care paths intended to improve the quality of life of dying patients.
D. Precept an advanced practice nursing student in a palliative care residency.

An APRN in the palliative care clinic is asked to see a patient with advanced multiple sclerosis. The APRN has not seen this patient before but, from reading the chart, determines that the patient has clearly deteriorated from the last visit. After discussing the patient's current problems, which of the following is the next step in the interview?
A. Discuss a hospice referral.
B. Review the current medications.
C. Ask whether or not the advance directive is current.
D. Determine what the patient knows or suspects regarding his disease.

Consider the process for meeting with patients. Before creating a plan, need to determine their illness understanding. So too soon for hospice. Medication review may be helpful but don’t determine plan. Can’t do ACP unless you understand what patient knows about their illness.
An APRN in the palliative care clinic is asked to see a patient with advanced multiple sclerosis. The APRN has not seen this patient before but, from reading the chart, determines that the patient has clearly deteriorated from the last visit. After discussing the patient's current problems, which of the following is the next step in the interview?

A. Discuss a hospice referral.
B. Review the current medications.
C. Ask whether or not the advance directive is current.
D. Determine what the patient knows or suspects regarding his disease.

An APRN receives a consult to discuss treatment goals for a patient with end-stage non-alcoholic hepatitis. He reports a close relationship with six women and requests they all be allowed to attend the family meeting. Which of the following should the APRN do to meet the needs of the patient?

A. Explain that this is not possible because polygamy is illegal.
B. Invite all six women to the meeting as requested by the patient.
C. Ask which woman will act as the patient's health care power of attorney.
D. Inform the patient he needs to choose one spokesperson from the family.

Consider patient autonomy. If patient has decision-making capacity. He can chose whom he wants at a family meeting. So all 6 woman can attend the meeting. At the family meeting, the APRN may want to determine a surrogate decision maker and a spokesperson to convey information.
An APRN receives a consult to discuss treatment goals for a patient with end-stage non-alcoholic hepatitis. He reports a close relationship with six women and requests they all be allowed to attend the family meeting. Which of the following should the APRN do to meet the needs of the patient?

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One major reason for the challenges faced in providing quality end-of-life care in ICU settings is

A. inadequate family input available for treatment decision-making.
B. reluctance to use opioids on mechanically ventilated patients.
C. moral prohibition about withdrawing life-sustaining treatment.
D. life-saving culture of the ICU.

Consider issues specific to the ICU and quality. All are generalizations. Which one is well-known.
One major reason for the challenges faced in providing quality end-of-life care in ICU settings is the
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B. reluctance to use opioids on mechanically ventilated patients.
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681 2-APPLICATION

Test Taking Preparation & Strategies

Timeline for Study
• Preparation is essential
• Study plan with a timeline from 3-6 months to the day of test
• Make a chart for studying
• If it is not on the outline (i.e. pediatrics) it is not on the examination
• Two years of clinical practice to draw upon is recommended
**Self Assessment**

Assess yourself – where you need help
- Complete the content review grid
- Look at your areas that you need to study
- Do not study what you already know
- The key: have a plan and follow through with it

**Practical Studying Tips**

- Find a comfortable and quiet place to study
  - Good lighting?
  - Distractions?
- Learn the general concepts first
- Take notes
  - Summary of important ideas
- Study in blocks of time on a particular area
  - 20-45 minutes
- Take short breaks frequently
  - 10-15 minutes

**Practical Studying Tips**

- Study with someone else
  - One person
  - Study group where each has an assignment to review a subject for others
- Ask questions of previous ACHPN® certificants
  - What resources were helpful?
  - Other tips?
- Review recommended resources to determine what you need to fill the gaps
- Budget your time
Practical Studying Tips

- Rely on study guides that simulate the experience of the exam
  - HPNA resources: E-Learning (free to members)
- Get back into test taking mode
  - Review practice questions
  - HPNF Self Assessment Exam (SAE)
- Try a practice test of similar length (100 or more at a time)
- Practice thinking for that long
  - The actual test a marathon; often people get fatigued at the end

Reducing Anxiety

- Maintain a positive attitude
- Focus on what your knowledge, skills, experience, and what you have learned
- Maintain regular sleep cycle
- Try to stay relaxed through activity and cognitive behavioral strategies

Planning For The Examination Day
Day Before Test Day

1. Test site
   - Confirm location/directions to AMP examination site
2. Registration
   - Confirm proper examination registration slip
   - Confirm social security number on examination slip
3. Identification
   - Confirm 2 forms of proper identification with pictures
     • Driver’s license with photograph
     • State identification with photograph
     • Passport with photograph
     • Military identification with photograph
4. Get a good night’s sleep, don’t cram all night

Day of Exam

• Transportation
  - Leave early and arrive early – consider traffic
• Necessary documents
  - Registration slip
  - Social security number
  - Proper identification – driver’s license
• Electronic equipment
  - Not allowed in the examination
  - Leave cell phones, personal digital assistants, calculators, or other
devices at home
• Food
  - Eat protein, avoid a heavy meal as this will make you tired
  - No snacks, food, or drink are allowed during examination
  - Bring comfort food and drink for after the examination

Forfeiture of Fees occurs if:

• Candidate doesn’t schedule an appointment within the testing window
• Candidate fails to reschedule an examination 2 days prior to the examination date
• Candidate fails to report for examination
• Candidate arrives 15 minutes late for examination
• Candidate fails to provide proper identification
Day of Examination

Taking the Exam
• Arrive on time, if late by more than 15 minutes candidate will not be admitted
• Only a wallet and keys are allowed – they will be locked up during the examination
• Pencils are provided
• Scratch paper is provided
• Breaks allowed but additional time will not be offered to compensate for any break time taken

The ACHPN® Exam Itself
1. Read all instructions carefully
2. Complete the Practice Examination to allow comfort with the computer process
3. Remember: the more questions you answer, the better chances for a better score
4. Pace yourself during examination
   • Don’t worry about how fast other people finish their test
5. Move quickly through the answers you are comfortable with
   • Mark unanswered questions for return and review
Answering the Questions

• Read each question completely and carefully
  • Make notes for emphasis
• There is only one right answer
• Remember EBP – Evidence-Based Practice guides the examination
  • Therefore do not read more into the question than is actually there
  • Don’t impose your own usual practice on the question: “We don’t do it that way!”

Ten Top Suggestions

1. Organize yourself for the examination
2. Pick out several key words to underline
3. Within each question, first read the stem without looking at the answers, then read the rest of the question
4. If the answer seems obvious, it probably is
5. If two or more incorrect answers are similar, both are wrong

Ten Top Suggestions

6. If two answers appear correct, choose the answer that causes the other to occur
7. Don’t agonize over a question for which you cannot figure the answer, mark it and move on
8. At the end of the test, return to the questions you skipped
9. Do not return to change a response
10. Be positive
Common Exam Mistakes

Problem: Not reading the question carefully
Solution: Read each word out loud softly to yourself to avoid missing or skipping words

Problem: Second-guessing yourself
Solution: Answer the questions yourself before looking at the answers

Problem: Not answering the question asked
Solution: Avoid reading into the question – what are the key words, the overall topic and stem

Problem: Not pacing yourself, getting stuck on a question
Solution: Manage your time, allow 1-2 minutes for a question, mark and come back to those hard ones

After the Exam

• Decompress – it’s over
• Move on
• Celebrate
• Wait for results
• Consider palliative care motto:
  1. Hope for the best but prepare for the worst

References – Content


References – Test Taking


HPNA E-Learning
Secrets of Competency Testing: Writing Items for Hospice and Palliative Certification Exams – Session 1
Secrets of Competency Testing: Writing Items for Hospice and Palliative Certification Exams – Session 2


References – Certification


Consensus Model for APRN Regulation: Licensure, Accreditation, Certification & Education

APRN Consensus Model FAQs