



*Certification Renewal  
&  
Exam Exemption  
Guide*

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## MEDICAL-SURGICAL NURSING Certification Renewal and Exam Exemption Guide

**Congratulations** on your commitment to certification in medical-surgical nursing. This guide will assist you in either renewing your Certified Medical-Surgical Registered Nurse (CMSRN®) certification through our renewal process or becoming a CMSRN through our exam exemption process.

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### CONTACT HOURS TRACKER

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The Contact Hours Tracker offers you the online convenience of taking charge of your certification renewal plan. When you choose to renew by continuing education, the Contact Hours Tracker is your online resource for planning, tracking, and applying for certification renewal.

Use the Contact Hours Tracker to enter and track contact hours, store your employment information, review the verification status of self-reported contact hours, and apply for CMSRN certification renewal.

The Contact Hours Tracker is a simple tool that shows your certification information, how close you are to renewing, and the contact hours counting toward your certification renewal.

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### CERTIFICATION RENEWAL

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The CMSRN credential is valid for a period of 5-years. Certification renewal is required to maintain the CMSRN credential through the Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board (MSNCB®).

The certification renewal options are:

#### **RENEW BY CONTINUING EDUCATION**

To renew by continuing education, first you must meet specific eligibility requirements (see eligibility criteria on page 2), comply with any application deadlines, and pay the appropriate certification renewal fee. Self-report contact hours, update employer information, and apply online through your Contact Hours Tracker at [amsn.org](http://amsn.org).

#### **RENEW BY EXAM**

To renew by examination, you must meet the exam eligibility criteria, complete the CMSRN Renew by Exam Application, and pay the appropriate application fee.

#### **RENEW BY EXAM EXEMPTION**

Certification renewal by exam exemption is offered to those registered nurses who are already certified in *medical-surgical nursing* by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC). An exam exemption application must be submitted thirty (30) days prior to the current certification expiration date, or up to one (1) year after the expiration date with a late fee\*.

You must meet the same eligibility criteria as renewing CMSRNs. Exam Exemption candidates can complete the online exam exemption application after creating an account. More information can be found at [amsn.org](http://amsn.org). If you have further questions after reviewing the website, feel free to contact customer service by emailing [certification@amsn.org](mailto:certification@amsn.org).

\*If your ANCC certification has expired, you are required to pay a late fee in addition to the application fee to apply for the CMSRN credential. Contact hours earned after your expiration date may be used one time only.

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## CERTIFICATION RENEWAL ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

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1. Hold a current certification in medical-surgical nursing through MSNCB or the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC).

**AND**

2. Hold a current, full, and unrestricted license as a registered nurse (RN) in the United States, its territories, or Canada; **OR** Hold a current, full, and unrestricted license as a first-level nurse in the country in which one's nursing education was completed, and meet the eligibility for licensure as a registered nurse (RN) in the United States in accordance with the requirements of the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS).

**AND**

3. Have accrued a minimum of 1,000 hours of nursing practice over the last five years in a medical-surgical setting. Practice may include clinical, management, or education.

RN students in a nursing baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degree program can waive the employment requirement by submitting documentation signed by a school official verifying full-time status and matriculation along with the application. Academic courses must be biopsychosocial content and must be offered by an accredited educational institution.

**AND**

4. Have earned 90 approved contact hours over the five-year period. At least 68 of these approved contact hours must be medical-surgical related. The remainder of the contact hours may be professional development or other nursing related subjects.

CNE education programs must be presented by an individual, state, or national organization accredited as a provider of continuing nursing education.

For initial certification renewal, contact hours earned as of January 1 of the first year of initial certification are acceptable. For all following certification renewals, contact hours within the current certification period may be submitted. Contact hour entries may be used in one certification renewal period only.

MSNCB shall not discriminate against any certification candidate on the basis of age, sex, race, religion, national origin, ethnicity, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. MSNCB shall not publish materials with discriminatory content, graphics or language that may be offensive to population sub-groups.

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## APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS

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When your 90 contact hours have been entered and verified, you've entered the required employment information, and you are within the application submission time frame, the online application and payment screen can be accessed from your Contact Hours Tracker at [amsn.org](http://amsn.org).

*Certification renewal applications will be accepted online only via your Contact Hours Tracker by selecting "renew now."*

### **Certification Renewal Application Deadlines**

You are eligible for CMSRN certification renewal starting one year prior to and up to one year after your current certification expiration date.

If your certification expires, you have a one-year grace period in which to renew (with a late fee). The CMSRN credential cannot be used with after your certification expiration date. After confirmation that your renewal was approved, you may resume using your CMSRN credential.

**Your application deadline date is 30 days prior to your certification expiration date.**

Allow up to 10 business days for self-reported contact hours to be reviewed and verified. After all required contact hours are verified, submit your application no later than 30 days prior to your certification expiration date to avoid a late fee.

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## INACTIVE OR RETIRED STATUS

(Not applicable to exam exempt applicants.)

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Inactive Status or Retired Status are alternatives for current CMSRNs. Online applications must be submitted **no later than 90 days prior to certification expiration** and will only appear as an optional application in your account if you meet this time sensitive eligibility requirement. Candidates applying for Inactive Status will be required to upload a detailed letter of explanation and can include supporting documentations. Candidates applying for retired status will be required to upload a letter provided to your employer or other supporting documentation confirming retirement. If granted, the Inactive or Retired Status begins the day after CMSRN certification expires.

### **Inactive Status:**

CMSRNs unable to meet the continuing educational or practice requirements may apply for Inactive CMSRN Status. Inactive status is for one 3-year period only and is a one-time career option. There are no exceptions or extensions to this time frame.

Inactive Status lasts for three years during which the certificant may not use the CMSRN credential. A nurse who uses CMSRN during Inactive Status will have the certification revoked. Nurses on Inactive Status will receive reminders in the last year of Inactive Status and must meet current certification renewal requirements.

### **Retired Status:**

CMSRNs who have retired within the current certification period but wish to stay connected with other CMSRNs may apply for Retired Status.

CMSRN Retired designation is renewable every five years. The retired nurse may use "CMSRN Retired" on a resume or below their name and credential on a business card but may NOT be used after your signature (e.g. patient chart, name badge). If a CMSRN Retired nurse re-enters the nursing workforce within the first year of the status, the nurse may regain the CMSRN credential via continuing education. If the CMSRN-Retired nurse re-enters the nursing workforce after the first year of the status, the nurse must regain CMSRN by examination.

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## CERTIFICATION RENEWAL FEES

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Prices are subject to change. It is the applicant's professional responsibility to have the most current information which can be found at [amsn.org](http://amsn.org).

### **Application Fees**

The renewal by continuing education and exam exemption fees include a non-refundable application fee of \$75.

\$275 Regular  
\$175 AMSN member

### **Inactive Status Fee**

\$165 Regular  
\$105 AMSN member

### **Retired Status Fee**

\$100 Regular  
\$75 AMSN member

### **Membership Discount**

To receive the member discount, AMSN membership must be active at the time of application.

If you are joining AMSN at the same time as applying for certification renewal:

First join AMSN at [amsn.org](http://amsn.org) before completing the certification renewal application.

### **Late Application Fee (non-refundable) - \$75**

Applications and fees are due at least 30 days prior to your certification expiration.

*Applications submitted after the application deadline will incur a \$75 late fee in addition to the application fee.*

### **Returned Check Fee - \$30**

An applicant whose personal check is returned for insufficient funds is required to pay this fee. Remittance of fees thereafter must be made by money order, certified check, or credit card.

### **Grants**

Certification Renewal Grants are available to AMSN members. For more information, visit [amsn.org](http://amsn.org).

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## AUDIT

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MSNCB conducts 10% random audits of applications to ensure candidates are eligible for certification renewal. Candidates selected for random audit will be notified by email or letter requesting copies of contact hour certificates, supervisor verification letter, and any additional information by a deadline date. Failure to provide this information within 30 days will result in your certification renewal being denied and your CMSRN credential revoked. Retain all contact hour certificates in your personal files in the event of an audit.

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## APPROVAL

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If the CMSRN credential is granted, the applicant will receive an email to claim a CMSRN digital badge. After claiming your digital badge, you will have to ability to print a wall certificate. A CMSRN lapel pin with number of years credentialed as a CMSRN will be mailed out two weeks after your certification renewal has been approved.

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## DENIAL AND REVOCATION OF CERTIFICATION

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The occurrence of any of the following actions will result in the denial, suspension or revocation of certification by the Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board:

1. Failure to meet certification or certification renewal criteria.
2. Any restrictions to professional RN license, such as revocation, suspension, probation, or other sanctions by a nursing authority.
3. Failure to pay any appropriate and required fees.
4. Failure to supply requested material by deadline.
5. Falsification of information on the MSNCB examination/certification renewal applications, or supporting documentation.
6. Cheating on the certification examination.
7. Misrepresentation of certification status.

Any other claims or causes for denial, suspension or revocation will be decided on a per case basis by the MSNCB Directors after thorough investigation. If certification is denied, suspended, or revoked for any reason, no fee will be refunded.

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## RIGHT OF APPEAL

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An appeal must be submitted in writing to the President of the Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board within 30 days of certification renewal denial notification. The appeal shall state specific reasons why the candidate is entitled to certification renewal.

The President will submit the appeal to the MSNCB Appeals Task Force which has 30 days to review blinded copies of all materials related to the appeal request. The Task Force Chairperson will notify the appeals applicant and MSNCB of the decision in writing. Any action required by the appeals decision will be carried out by the MSNCB Directors.

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## RENEWAL CONTACT HOURS

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Ninety (90) contact hours (CH) are required for certification renewal by continuing education. Of these, at least 68 contact hours must be medical-surgical nursing specific.

### **Medical-Surgical Nursing Contact Hours:**

These hours include content related to direct patient care in a medical-surgical setting. If the content of the activity is included in the CMSRN exam blueprint, then the contact hours will be considered medical-surgical nursing. A minimum of 68 contact hours in this category is required; however, it is permissible to have all 90 med-surg contact hours with no professional development.

### **Professional Development and Other Health Related Contact Hours:**

These contact hours include the broad area of health care, general nursing, and professional development. Topics include leadership, how to conduct research, nursing theory, informatics, pediatrics, ethics, blood matching, and more. A maximum of 22 contact hours in this category is permitted.

### **Contact Hours Awarded:**

Contact hours will be given according to the number awarded. Contact hours earned from January 1 of the first year of initial certification may be submitted for initial certification renewal. For all following certifications, contact hours within the current certification period may be submitted.

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## CONTACT HOUR REPORTING

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Here are some helpful tips and reminders for earning and reporting contact hours.

- Earn your contact hours continuously throughout your five-year certification period.
- Enter your hours in your Contact Hours Tracker as you earn them.  
Self-reported contact hours are manually verified for accuracy of information. Allow up to 10 business days for your Contact Hours Tracker to be updated.  
**Contact hours categorization may be revised and/or denied due to duplication or unacceptable contact hour submission.**

When reporting preceptor/mentor hours, you must upload a completed Preceptor/Mentor Verification Form found at the end of this guide or on the MSNCB website for the hours to be verified. If reporting academic courses, you must upload a copy of your unofficial transcript before the hours will be verified.

Copies of certificates are only required if your renewal application is randomly selected for audit. Never send original certificates.

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### ACCEPTABLE CONTACT HOUR ACTIVITIES

#### *Continuing Nursing Education (CNE) Activities*

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#### 1. Continuing Nursing Education (CNE) Activities

CNE contact hour activities provide a contact hour certificate. Activities include journal articles, courses, workshops, and independent study.

- Contact hours in this category may be counted toward medical-surgical or professional development, depending on the content.
- Education programs must be presented by an individual, state, or national organization accredited as a provider or approver of continuing nursing education.
- Continuing Nursing Education (CNE) contact hours must include the title, amount of CNE rewarded, date earned and an ANCC accredited provider.
- ACLS course work is accepted only once per certification period.
- BLS course work **is not** accepted, as it is typically required for registered nurses.
- Contact hours earned at an education convention or seminar with multiple sessions may be listed as a total amount for the entire convention or seminar. MSNCB reserves the right to request additional information on convention or seminar content or objectives.
- All contact hours provided by the Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSN) are considered entirely as medical-surgical contact hours and sync directly with your Contact Hours Tracker after completing the evaluation.
- Continuing Medical Education (CME) activities are acceptable when the content is also applicable to nursing. If audited, course outline and/or objectives must be submitted. One CME = 1 CH.

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### ACCEPTABLE CONTACT HOUR ACTIVITIES

#### *non-Continuing Nursing Education (non-CNE) Activities*

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#### 2. Preceptorship/Mentoring

Preceptors/Mentors must provide medical-surgical focused clinical supervision to baccalaureate, masters or doctoral degree students and/or newly hired nurses.

- Contact hours in this category may be counted toward medical-surgical CH.
- The Preceptor/Mentor Verification form, found at the end of this guide or at [amsn.org](http://amsn.org), must be completed and uploaded when reporting the contact hours.
- 30 hours as a preceptor/mentor = 5 CH, with a maximum of 20 CH per certification renewal period.

#### 3. Academic Courses

A registered nurse enrolled in an accredited baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degree program may receive CH for academic course work related to medical-surgical nursing.

- Contact hours in this category may be counted toward medical-surgical or professional development, depending on the content.
- General education courses may not be used.
- A copy of a transcript must be uploaded when reporting the contact hours. In the event of an audit, an official transcript must be provided.
- One academic hour (credit) = 15 CH, with a maximum of 75 CH allowed per certification renewal period.

#### 4. Presentations

This category includes the preparation and presentation of content for academic courses and CNE programs.

- Contact hours in this category may be counted toward medical-surgical or professional development, depending on the content.
- Presentations must be awarded academic credit or contact hours. Contact hours must be awarded by an accredited or approved provider of continuing nursing education.
- Each course applies one time only in the certification renewal period regardless of how many times the course is taught.
- One hour of presentation = 3 CH, with a maximum of 45 CH per certification renewal period.
  - Example 1: *A college level medical-surgical course of 12 one-hour class sessions is presented during a semester for a 3-credit course. (12 X 3 = 36 CH) The educator may claim 36 CH.*
  - Example 2: *An RN presents a 2-hour CNE class one time only within the health care system. (2 X 3 = 6 CH) The RN may claim 6 CH.*
- If audited, a letter from the event organizer must be provided.

#### 5. Professional Publications

The format must be a manuscript, research paper, book, or book chapter and must be published by a recognized publisher or professional journal.

- Contact hours in this category may be counted toward medical-surgical or professional development, depending on the content.
- A maximum of 25 CH per certification renewal period is allowed for this category.
- Authors, co-authors, or editors of a book earn 25 CH.
- Authors or co-authors of a book chapter earn 10 CH.
- Authors or co-authors of a published article earn 5 CH.
- If audited, the following materials must be submitted: Title of publication; Name of publication, if book chapter or article; Publisher; Date; Objectives; and Bibliography.

#### 6. Conference Poster Presentation

The poster must be relevant to medical-surgical nursing and presented at a regional or national meeting.

- Contact hours in this category may be counted toward medical-surgical or professional development, depending on content.
- Each poster will be counted only once during the certification renewal period, regardless of how many times the poster is presented.
- One poster = 5 CH, with a maximum of 20 CH per certification renewal period.
- If audited, proof of poster development and presentation must be provided (e.g., meeting syllabus).

#### 7. Multimedia Program Development

This category includes the development of program content and script for videotapes, audiotapes, or other electronic media.

- Contact hours in this category may be counted toward medical-surgical or professional development, depending on content.
- The program must be awarded contact hours.
- The production of one 60-minute program = 5 CH, with a maximum of 20 CH per certification renewal period.
- If audited, the following materials must be submitted: Media type; Objectives; Script or program outline; and Bibliography.

#### 8. Research and Evidence-Based Practice Projects

This category includes research projects that have been approved by the Investigational Review Board (IRB) in your facility in which you are clearly identified as being one of the primary investigators. This category also includes evidence-based practice projects that have been given exempt status by the IRB or have been implemented in your health care organization and are reflected in its policies, procedures, or clinical guidelines. You must be clearly identified as being one of the primary champions in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the project.

- Contact hours in this category may be counted toward medical-surgical nursing practice or professional development.
- A copy of the research proposal submitted to your organization's IRB or the evidence-based practice project must be included.
- One research project = 30 CH, with a maximum of 30 CH per certification renewal period.
- One evidence-based practice project = 15 CH, with a maximum of 15 CH per certification period.



**9. Member of a National Nursing Organization Board or National Committee Chair**

- Contact hours in this category may be counted toward professional development.
- One hour of participation = 1 CH with a maximum of 5 CH per certification renewal period.
- If audited, a letter verifying service from the president of the national nursing organization must be provided.

**10. Test Development/Item Writing/Item Reviewing for MSNCB**

Members of any MSNCB Test Development/Item Writer & Item Reviewer Committee may count their active participation when renewing.

- Contact hours in this category may be counted towards the specific practice designated by MSNCB.
- One weekend session = 5 CH with a maximum of 20 CH per certification renewal period.

**11. MSNCB Certification Renewal Committee**

Members of any MSNCB Certification Renewal Committee may count their active participation time when renewing.

- Contact hours in this category may be counted towards professional development.
- 2 CH/year with a maximum of 20 CH per certification renewal period.

**12. Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses Volunteer Units**

Members of most AMSN Volunteer Units may count their active participation when renewing.

Contact AMSN's Volunteer Relations Coordinator to determine your eligibility.

- Contact hours in this category may be counted toward the specific practice designated by AMSN.
- 5 CH/year with a maximum of 20 CH per certification renewal period.

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**CHANGE OF CONTACT INFORMATION**

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MSNCB and its testing vendor will retain electronic records of all candidates and certificants for at least five (5) years. It is the professional responsibility of the applicant to notify MSNCB of any change in name, mailing address, phone number and/or email address. These changes may be made online by updating your account at [amsn.org](http://amsn.org) after logging in or may be directed to MSNCB National Office.

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**INFORMATION ABOUT MSNCB**

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The Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board (MSNCB™) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to validate excellence in medical-surgical nursing and care coordination and transition management.

MSNCB is composed of seven board members: five who hold an MSNCB certification, a public member, and an ex-officio member (the current AMSN president or designee). MSNCB nurse members are appointed to represent the diverse roles and settings in which medical-surgical nurses and care coordination nurses practice as well as varied demographic characteristics.

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**INFORMATION ABOUT AMSN**

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The Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSN) is the only national professional nursing specialty organization dedicated to the practice of medical-surgical nursing. For further information about AMSN, please visit [amsn.org](http://amsn.org).

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT CMSRN CERTIFICATION RENEWAL AND EXAM EXEMPTION**

### **When do I need to submit my certification renewal application?**

Your application deadline date is 30 days prior to your certification expiration date. Complete your application by selecting “Renew Now” from your Contact Hours Tracker. Applications submitted after the deadline date will incur a \$75 late fee.

You are eligible for certification renewal as early as one year before your certification expiration date, and up to one year after this time (with a late fee).

### **How far back can I claim contact hours?**

You can include any contact hours beginning from January of the year you were initially certified, or from your most recent certification renewal date.

### **How come my category type changed to Professional Development (PROFDEV)?**

MSNCB staff review and verify each contact hour activity. Activities with topics that cover the broad area of health care and general nursing are categorized as professional development. Staff adjust the category before verifying the activity.

### **How do I know if my contact hours are medical-surgical or professional development?**

There are several ways to determine if the content of your contact hours is medical-surgical or professional development. If the topic is covered on the exam blueprint, the activity is acceptable for medical-surgical. Topics like leadership, how to conduct research, nursing theory, informatics, pediatrics, and ethics are considered professional development.

### **Do all medical-surgical nursing contact hours (CH) need to be awarded through AMSN?**

No. CNE activities must be provided or co-provided by any individual, state, or national organization accredited as a provider or approver of continuing nursing education. However, AMSN is an excellent resource for medical-surgical nursing education and all AMSN awarded CHs may be counted toward medical-surgical practice.

### **Do I send in copies of my contact hour certificates?**

No, do not send copies of your certificates when you apply. Retain your certificates in case your application is selected for random audit. Application selected for audit are required to submit a copy of all certificates within a 30-day time frame.

### **I went back to school. Can I use classes from my degree for contact hours?**

If you have been accepted into an accredited baccalaureate, master or doctoral degree program, academic courses may be counted toward medical-surgical practice or professional development, depending on the content. A copy of a transcript must be submitted for approval. Each academic hour = 15 contact hours with a maximum of 75 CH allowed per certification renewal period.

### **I have more contact hours of continuing education than the required amount. Should I list more activities I attended?**

Yes. Please limit additional contact hours to 5 to 10.

### **Do I have to wait until my current ANCC medical-surgical certification is about to expire to apply for the CMSRN?**

You may apply for exam exemption no sooner than 30-days prior to the current certification expiration date, or up to one (1) year after the expiration date with a late fee.

### **What will happen if I am unable to meet the continuing education requirements for certification via exam exemption?**

If you are unable to meet the continuing education requirements for certification via exam exemption, you can obtain certification by taking the CMSRN examination.

### **I attended a medical-surgical program that offered continuing medical education (CME) credit, but not nursing contact hours. Can I use this?**

Yes, as long as the content is also useful for nursing.

### **I am the second author of a medical-surgical nursing article published in a recognized professional journal. Can I receive partial or full credit for publication?**

Both authors and co-authors receive full credit.

### **I attended a certification review course before taking the exam. Will I be able to use this course's contact hours when I renew?**

Yes, if you took the course in the same year you became certified.

### **Where is the preceptor form?**

The preceptor form is found at the end of this guide or at [amsn.org](http://amsn.org).

**PRECEPTOR/MENTOR VERIFICATION FORM**

*This form must be completed and uploaded when reporting preceptor/mentor hours in your Contact Hours Tracker.*

Hours claimed are for providing clinical supervision to baccalaureate, masters or doctoral degree students and/or newly hired nurses in educational and professional settings.  
Courses taken about preceptorship or mentoring should be reported as CNE activities.

30 hours as a preceptor/mentor = 5 CH, with a maximum of 20 CH per certification renewal period

This preceptorship must be verified by the signature of the faculty member or educator who supervised your preceptorship/mentorship.

*Please Print*

Preceptor's Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_ First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. The individual named above has completed  hours of med-surg focused preceptorship/mentorship.  
*Provide only the **number of hours worked** as a preceptor/mentor.*

2. The preceptorship/mentorship was with (Name of nurse): \_\_\_\_\_

Nursing Student

New Graduate Nurse

Newly Hired Nurse

3. The dates of preceptorship/mentorship were \_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_

4. Name of the facility/institution **OR** name of the educational institution for which preceptorship/mentorship occurred: \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPERVISOR:**

I attest that the above-named candidate has completed the number of preceptor/mentor hours indicated:

Print Supervisor Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Facility Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: (\_\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

*An original signature is required for contact hours to be approved.*

**MSNCB National Office**

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