



# Continuing Competency Initiative

## Changes to the NCC Maintenance Program are Here

On June 1, 2010 the following major changes to the NCC maintenance process will occur. These changes are being initiated to assure that the continuing education options chosen by the certified nurse\* meet individual specific learning needs. This will assist in assuring the core certification specialty knowledge competencies as reflected on the current certification examinations are maintained in a formalized and individualized manner. This change will not affect those certified in areas no longer tested by NCC and does not apply to the certificate of added qualification credential holders [see Box A](#) on page 12, for the specified list of credentials that are not affected.

A new Professional Development Certification Maintenance Program will replace the current Certification Maintenance Program. The new program will include the use of a specialty assessment evaluation to identify targeted individual-specific continuing education needs to address knowledge gaps and provide a learning plan that the certified nurse can follow to meet certification maintenance requirements. The program will be implemented in two stages as described inside.

*\* refers to any individual holding a core NCC certification as a RNC, WHNP-BC or NNP-BC*

# Why are Changes Being Made?

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## Recognition

*of the expanding knowledge base needed to function in an increasingly complex health environment.*

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The changes in the maintenance program are being made in recognition of the expanding knowledge base needed to function in an increasingly complex health care environment. This approach also brings greater accountability and transparency to the certification maintenance process while providing employers and the public a valid measure of assurance regarding the ongoing competency of nurses certified by NCC.

It also aligns NCC with other professions who have added continuing competency components to their maintenance processes including physicians, pharmacists, physical therapists and nurses in Great Britain, Australia and Canada. Many state boards of nursing are also introducing continuing competency measures for nursing re-licensure.

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# Determine

*that each certified nurse has maintained core certification specialty knowledge competencies related to the certification specialty role.*

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The focus of the certification maintenance program is to determine that each certified nurse has maintained knowledge competencies related to the certification specialty role. Maintenance should validate knowledge competencies of NCC certified nurses by establishing requirements that are consistent with current education curricula (where appropriate), national standards of practice and current specialty practice as determined by the NCC content validation studies. Certification is a process that functions on a continuum throughout the nurse's career supported by life-long learning and ongoing professional development which includes maintenance of their core certification specialty knowledge competencies.

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# Demonstrate

*maintenance of core certification specialty knowledge competencies currently outlined and tested for their certification specialty.*

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In many cases, health care professionals may expand their role or perhaps narrow their practice in a subspecialty area over time resulting in the evolution of new competencies or a shift in competency focus to meet the individual practice role. While these changes are appropriate, maintenance of the NCC certification requires that the certified nurse demonstrate maintenance of the core certification specialty knowledge competencies as they are currently outlined and tested for their certification specialty. Since regulators, employers and other interested parties use certification to identify and validate the knowledge competencies and clinical expertise in the identified specialty, it is the responsibility of each NCC certified nurse to maintain the stated core certification specialty knowledge competencies through active participation in the Professional Development Certification Maintenance Program.

# Stage 1

**June 2010 - December 2013**

**The continuing education requirements will remain unchanged: 45 continuing education hours in your certification specialty will continue to be required.**

In Stage 1, beginning in June 2010, the major change to the certification maintenance program will be the addition of a specialty assessment evaluation.

For the next three years (through December 31, 2013)

- All NCC certified nurses will be required to take the specialty assessment evaluation at least once.
- This specialty assessment evaluation will be composed of 125 questions relating to content of the core certification specialty knowledge competencies.
- It won't be binding relative to the amount and nature of continuing education you will need to earn.
- There is no pass/fail criterion.
- The specialty assessment evaluation is designed to provide you feedback on your core certification specialty knowledge competencies.
- You will earn 5 continuing education hours for taking the specialty assessment evaluation that will apply to your 45 hours maintenance specialty hour requirement.

We hope this trial period will give you a first hand experience with the specialty assessment evaluation and will serve as a valuable tool as you plan your continuing education activities for maintenance.

This specialty assessment evaluation is designed to assist you in identifying your core certification specialty knowledge strengths and gaps. In Stage 2, beginning in 2014, the specialty assessment evaluation will determine the amount and nature of continuing education you will need to earn to maintain your certification.

# Taking the Specialty Assessment Evaluation - How Will It Work?

- There will be NO fee to take the specialty assessment evaluation.
- It will be accessed from the NCC website [www.nccwebsite.org](http://www.nccwebsite.org).
- It will be composed of 125 questions related to the content areas of your core certification specialty knowledge competencies.
- You will have 2 hours and 15 minutes to take it.
- The specialty assessment evaluation is limited to a one-time, two hour and 15 minute session.
- Following the specialty assessment evaluation, you will receive a specialty index report. The report will use a scale of 0-10 to provide you feedback in each major content area covered in the specialty assessment evaluation.  
[See an example of the report on Page 11.](#)
- You will earn 5 continuing education hours **toward your certification maintenance by taking the specialty assessment evaluation.**

[See Box B](#) on pages 12-13, for the content areas covered for each certification specialty area.

## When to Take the Specialty Assessment Evaluation?

The specialty assessment evaluation will be available starting in June 2010 on the NCC website. You will be required to take it at least once during the period of June 2010 through December 2013. We encourage you to take it as early as possible in your current maintenance cycle.

You will earn 5 continuing education hours for your participation and it will be applied to your 45 hour maintenance requirement. You will receive a specialty index report which will give you a feedback on each major core certification specialty knowledge competency area.

# Stage 2

## Begins January 1, 2014

The new professional development certification maintenance program will involve

### four major steps

to demonstrate continued knowledge of your core certification specialty knowledge competencies:

1	<b>Step 1 Current Licensure</b>	Hold a valid, current unrestricted nursing license
2	<b>Step 2 Participate in Specialty Assessment Evaluation</b>	Each certified nurse will participate in a NCC specialty assessment evaluation that will assess knowledge level in the major certification core competency specialty areas.
3	<b>Step 3 Development of a Learning Plan</b>	A learning plan will be provided based on the results of your specialty assessment evaluation. The plan will identify those specialty areas upon which professional development education should focus and which reflect current standard of practice.
4	<b>Step 4 Documentation of Individual Specific Continuing Education Activities</b>	The number of continuing education hours and content of the continuing education will be determined by the specialty index report provided to you after you take the specialty assessment evaluation. The total number of required continuing education hours can range from 15 to 50 continuing education hours. <a href="#">See the specified content areas on page 12.</a> Documentation of completion of the targeted education activities as identified from the specialty assessment evaluation and indicated in your specialty index report will be required. You will also be required to submit a maintenance application that includes a copy of the learning plan, which will be maintained on the NCC website under your account.

# 1

## Step 1 Current Licensure

# Detailed Overview of Stage 2

Current unrestricted license in nursing will be required.

# 2

## Step 2 Participate in Specialty Assessment Evaluation

- A specialty assessment evaluation will be taken by each certified nurse to assess core certification specialty knowledge competencies.
- The specialty assessment evaluation will cover topics that reflect the major content areas tested on the certification exam for the specified specialty.
- The purpose of this specialty evaluation process is to assist only in identifying areas of specialty knowledge strengths and gaps.  
**Results will not affect certification status but will affect the amount and nature of continuing education required for maintenance of your NCC credential.**
- The results of the evaluation will define the nature and amount of continuing education that will be required for certification maintenance.
- **There is no pass and fail and you are not required to earn a minimum score to maintain your certification.**
- The specialty assessment evaluation will be composed of 125 questions and will be given in a one time, two hour, 15 minute session on the NCC website.
- The specialty assessment evaluation is available on demand and can be taken at any time the certified nurse chooses.
- The specialty assessment evaluation can be taken from any computer or any setting.
- Each specialty assessment evaluation (for the various certifications) will assess **four major specialty areas reflecting the core certification specialty knowledge competencies.**
- A specialty index of 7.5 or better on a 10 point scale achieved in each designated certification specialty area will satisfy maintenance continuing education requirements for that specific specialty area. No continuing education will be required for that specialty area. See the specialty areas for each specialty assessment evaluation in **Box B** on pages 12-13.
- The specialty assessment evaluation will need to be taken within the first two years of each three year maintenance cycle so that there is at least one year to earn the continuing education that the specialty assessment evaluation indicates is required.  
It is, however, encouraged that you

take the specialty assessment evaluation as early in your maintenance cycle as possible.

- **The specialty assessment evaluation is provided at no cost to you.**
- Only continuing education earned after taking the specialty assessment evaluation can be used for maintenance and it must be in the areas as identified by the specialty index report.

The concept underlying this evaluation is to validate how well an individual maintains core certification specialty knowledge competencies using clinical practice experience, educational endeavors and/or professional development activities.

### **3** Step 3 Development of a Learning Plan

## Underlying Concept

*To validate how well an individual maintains core certification specialty knowledge competencies using clinical practice experience, educational endeavors and/or professional development activities.*

Your specialty index report which will identify a specialty index for each core certification specialty knowledge competency will be maintained in your NCC account on the NCC website. This will be your learning plan and will identify the amount and nature of the continuing education that needs to be completed.

### The Benefits

Certified nurses will have the following benefits from the new professional development maintenance program:

- Continuing education requirements will be individualized to meet the identified knowledge gaps in competency areas.
- It is anticipated that in most cases continuing education requirements will be less than the potential maximum required hours.
- Continuing education will be required only in areas demonstrated by the specialty assessment evaluation that need further updating. With directed education, certified nurses will pursue education activities that build on their core certification specialty knowledge competencies without requiring a one-size fits all approach to ongoing learning.
- You will earn 5 continuing education hours for taking the specialty assessment evaluation.
- Public confidence in the certified nurses' abilities will be realized knowing that the maintenance process is individualized to address individual knowledge gaps.
- The specialty assessment evaluation will provide an objective measure of the core certification specialty knowledge competencies through an external process involving certified cohorts for development of the assessment and psychometric analysis to validate outcomes.

# 4

## Step 4 Documentation of Individual Specific Continuing Education Activities

### Summary of Fees and Maintenance Requirements

If an individual achieves a 7.5 specialty index or better for all certification content categories, their continuing education maintenance requirement will be 15 hours in any area of the certification specialty. This will need to be completed within the current maintenance cycle.

If the specialty index is below 7.5, a specified amount of continuing education for each competency knowledge area will be required with a maximum of 50 hours of continuing education if a 7.5 specialty index is not achieved in any area. The 5 hours earned for participating in the specialty assessment evaluation can be applied to any specialty area designated for a continuing education requirement. So the total continuing education commitment remains at 45 continuing education hours but the nature of the continuing education may be significantly different. (See the specific Core Certification Specialty Knowledge Competencies Areas for the number of continuing education hours associated with each specialty area - [See Box B](#) on pages 12-13).

The maintenance fee remains at \$100 (discounts are still afforded to those using the NCC self assessment program). Those using NCC self assessment modules will be able to earn additional discounts as the program allows currently but the maintenance fee will not be reduced to a fee of less than \$50 regardless of the number of continuing education hours earned through the self assessment program. This will also apply to the Pretest Program relative to [discounted fees](#).

### Other Recognized Activities and Designated Hour Assignment

**These activities have to be outside your expected employment responsibilities.**

Participation in the activities listed below can be utilized in lieu of continuing education. However, they must address the targeted specialty content from the specialty assessment evaluation as applicable.

No more than the designated hours can be earned in each of the activities.

**A total of 5 hours can be substituted for any of the following activities:**

- Authorship of a journal article or book chapter
- Presentation of an accredited continuing education course

**A total of 10 hours can be substituted for any of the following activities:**

- Editor of a book
- Preceptor students in the same specialty area of certification

**During Stage 1**, the traditional 45 hour continuing education requirement or retesting options will continue to be provided for maintenance but the specialty assessment evaluation is required. This new program applies only to those who hold a current core certification and does not affect maintenance of subspecialty credentials or maintenance for those individuals who hold a credential that is no longer being offered by NCC. For those who hold a credential no longer offered by NCC or a certificate of added qualification, the current maintenance program will be in effect now and in the foreseeable future.

**Individuals** who fail to take the specialty assessment evaluation at least once through December 2013, will be required to show **a total of** 50 continuing education hours covering all the relevant competency areas as noted in **Box B** (see pages 12-13) for their certification specialty for the next cycle of maintenance which occurs after 2013.

The option of certification maintenance via re-testing will remain the same for all certifications and subspecialty certificates.

**Alternatives to the Professional Development Certification Maintenance Program (Beginning in 2014)**

For those who do not wish to use the new Professional Development Certification Maintenance program or re-take the certification exam, the continuing education requirement will be:

- 50 hours in specific content categories as noted on the next page for a total of 50 hours.
- The maintenance fee will be increased to \$175 after 2013 for those participating in alternative maintenance process. No NCC self assessment discounts will apply.
- Certificate of completion and program curricula for each program used for continuing education will need to be submitted in a PDF format and uploaded to the NCC website.
- All continuing education must be accredited.
- Acceptable accrediting agencies include: state boards of nursing, CME credits, ANCC or academic credit. NCC self assessment modules/activities can be used to meet specialty hour requirements.

## Sample Specialty Index Report: Women's Health Care Nurse Practitioner

<b>Physical Assessment &amp; Diagnostic Tools</b> <b>9.5</b>  <b>Physiology &amp; Pathophysiology</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary Care <b>8.5</b></li> <li>• Gynecology <b>9.0</b></li> <li>• Obstetrics <b>9.5</b></li> </ul> <b>Pharmacology</b> <b>7.5</b>  <b>Professional Practice</b> <b>4.0</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Learning Plan</u></b></p> <p>15 continuing education hours in any specialty area</p> <p>5 continuing education hours in Professional Practice</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>WHNP Core Certification</u></b> <b><u>Knowledge Competency Specialty</u></b> <b><u>Area and Hour Requirements</u></b></p> <p><u>Physical Assessment &amp; Diagnostic Tools</u> - <b>5 hours</b></p> <p><u>Normal Physiology &amp; Pathophysiology</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary Care - <b>10 hours</b></li> <li>• Gynecology - <b>10 hours</b></li> <li>• Obstetrics - <b>10 hours</b></li> </ul> <p><u>Pharmacology</u> - <b>10 hours</b></p> <p><u>Professional Practice</u> - <b>5 hours</b></p>
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## Comparison of Professional Development Certification Maintenance Program and Other Maintenance Options

	<b>Current Maintenance Through 2013</b>	<b>Professional Development Program</b>	<b>Alternative Maintenance</b> (2014 and after and those who do not take the specialty assessment evaluation once prior to 2013)
<b>Continuing Education Requirements</b>	45 hours in the certification specialty area	Variable 15 to 50 hours depending on specialty assessment evaluation outcomes	50 hours covering all core certification specialty knowledge competency areas
<b>Maintenance Fee</b>	\$100	\$100	\$175 beginning 1/2014
<b>Test Required</b>	Required at least once	Required	None
<b>Learning Plan</b>	No	Yes	No
<b>Re-exam Option Available</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes

# Box A

## Certifications Not Affected by Maintenance Changes

### Discontinued Core Certifications

- ANA-MCH Joint Certification in Maternal, Gynecological and Neonatal Nursing
- Reproductive Endocrinology/Infertility Nursing
- Ambulatory Women's Health Care Nursing
- High Risk Obstetric Nursing
- Telephone Nursing Practice

### Certificates of Added Qualification (current and discontinued)

- Electronic Fetal Monitoring - **Current**
- Breastfeeding – Discontinued
- Menopause Clinician and Educator - Discontinued
- Neonatal Pediatric Transport – **Current**
- Reproductive Gynecologic Health - Discontinued
- Obstetrics for the Primary Care Nurse Practitioner – Discontinued

# Box B

## Core Certification Specialty Knowledge Competencies

*(Topics may be subject to change)*

### Overview of the Core Certification Specialty Area

#### Women's Health Care Nurse Practitioner

- Physical Assessment & Diagnostic Tools (5 hours) • Normal Physiology and Pathophysiology (30 hours covering primary care, gynecology and obstetrics) • Pharmacology (10 hours) • Professional Practice (5 hours)

#### Inpatient Obstetric Nursing

- Fetal Assessment & Labor and Delivery (20 Hours) • Pregnancy & Obstetric Complications (15 hours) • Postpartum and Normal Newborn (10 Hours) • Professional Practice (5 hours)

#### Neonatal Intensive Care Nursing

- General Assessment & Management (20 hours) • Physiology & Pathophysiology (15 hours) • Pharmacologic Management (10 hours) • Professional Practice (5 hours)

#### Neonatal Nurse Practitioner

- Physical Assessment (5 hours) • Physiology & Pathophysiology *including general management* (30 hours) • Pharmacology (10 hours) • Professional Practice (5 hours)

#### Low Risk Neonatal Nursing

- Mother Fetus (5 hours) • Physical Assessment (10 hours) • Management of Neonatal Complications (30 hours) • Professional Practice (5 hours)

#### Maternal Newborn Nursing

- Maternal/Neonatal Factors Affecting Outcomes (5 hours) • Postpartum Assessment & Management (20 hours) • Newborn Assessment & Management (20 hours) • Professional Practices (5 hours)

## Box B - continued

### **Women's Health Care Nurse Practitioner**

#### Physical Assessment & Diagnostic Tools

- 5 hours

#### Normal Physiology & Pathophysiology

- Primary Care - 10 hours
- Gynecology - 10 hours
- Obstetrics - 10 hours

#### Pharmacology

- 10 hours

#### Professional Practice

- 5 hours

### **Inpatient Obstetric Nursing**

#### Fetal Assessment & Labor/Delivery

- Fetal Assessment - 10 hours
- Labor Management - 10 hours

#### Pregnancy & Obstetric Complications

- 15 hours

#### Postpartum & Normal Newborn

- Postpartum - 5 hours
- Normal Newborn - 5 hours

#### Professional Practice

- 5 hours

### **Neonatal Intensive Care Nursing**

#### General Assessment & Management

- Risk Assessment, Gestational age assessment, physical examination, behavioral/ psychosocial adjustment and developmental care - 10 hours
- Thermoregulation & Nutrition - 10 hours

#### Physiology & Pathophysiology

- System Complications  
(includes fluids & electrolytes & oxygenation and homeostasis) - 15 hours

#### Pharmacologic Management

- 10 hours

#### Professional Practice

- 5 hours

## Box B - continued

### **Neonatal Nurse Practitioner**

#### Physical Assessment

(Includes risk assessment, gestational age assessment, physical examination, clinical laboratory & diagnostic studies & family integration) - 5 hours

#### Physiology and Pathophysiology

- System Complications - 20 hours
- General Management  
(Includes Thermoregulation, Nutrition, Fluids and Electrolytes, and Resuscitation and Stabilization) - 10 hours

#### Pharmacology

- 10 hours

#### Professional Practice

- 5 hours

### **Low Risk Neonatal Nursing**

#### Mother/Fetus

- 5 hours

#### Physical Assessment

(Includes physical examination, gestational age assessment, diagnostic laboratory evaluation and behavioral assessment) - 5 hours

- Thermoregulation - 5 hours

#### Management of Neonatal Complications

(Includes perinatal substance abuse) - 15 hours

- Hyperbilirubinemia - 10 hours
- Pharmacologic Management - 5 hours

#### Professional Practice

- 5 hours

### **Maternal Newborn Nursing**

#### Maternal/Neonatal Factors Affecting Outcomes

- 5 hours

#### Postpartum Assessment & Management

- 20 hours

#### Newborn Assessment & Management

- 20 hours

#### Professional Practice

- 5 hours

# Frequently Asked Questions About Stage 2 of the Continuing Competency Initiative

*For Stage 1 the only new requirement is that you take the specialty assessment evaluation **once** during the period June 2010 through December 2013.*

## **Q: What if I don't want to take the specialty assessment evaluation?**

While we highly encourage you to participate, you can opt out but your continuing education requirements will be increased to 50 hours and they must be earned in all four content areas of your specialty as noted in Box B. The maintenance fee will be \$175 and you will be required to submit documentation of your activities in a PDF format for upload to the NCC website. No NCC self assessment price discounts will apply.

## **Q: Why is there a higher fee if I don't take the specialty assessment evaluation?**

In order for NCC to assess that you have maintained competency in the major certification competencies, we will have to review your certificates which takes more resources and time to accomplish. The cost for that will be borne by the individual.

## **Q: What happens if I get 7.5 specialty index in all content areas?**

Your continuing education requirement would then be 15 continuing education hours in your certification specialty area, the specified topics would be of your choosing.

## **Q: What if there is no continuing education in the content area the specialty assessment evaluation indicates I need?**

The NCC Self Assessment Program will provide continuing education for all areas but no one is required to use NCC Self Assessment Program to meet the continuing education requirements.

## **Q: I will maintain in March of 2010. When do I have to take the specialty assessment evaluation?**

You must take it once from the period of June 2010 through December 2013. Stage 2 will not affect you until your next new maintenance cycle which will start April 1, 2013.

## **Q: What will happen if I don't take the specialty assessment evaluation in time and don't have enough time to meet my continuing education requirements.**

The same options will be available to you as they are now. If you need additional time, then you can request an extension for a fee. If you don't file your maintenance on time, you will have one year to reinstate for a fee.

## **Q: If I don't earn continuing education in the required areas but have at least 50 hours, can I still maintain?**

No, you have to meet both the hour and content requirements. If you don't, you will have to extend or reinstate whichever applies.

## **Q: I guess I really don't understand this. If I take the specialty assessment evaluation and get a 7.5 specialty index in all areas, I really only have to earn 10 continuing education hours to maintain my certification?**

Yes, that is correct. While the requirement is 15 continuing education hours, because you earn 5 continuing education

hours for the specialty assessment, that makes your continuing education commitment 10 continuing education hours in the certification specialty area of your choosing.

**Q: Do I have to study for the specialty assessment evaluation? Will NCC provide study guides?**

The specialty assessment evaluation is not a pass/fail situation. It is an assessment to provide feedback on your areas of strength and knowledge gaps. Your practice experience should be your best preparation because if you are working in your core competency area, your knowledge level should be up to date. NCC will not be providing study guides.

**Q: I have been certified as a WHNP for 10 years but my practice now deals almost exclusively in gynecologic patients with a subspecialty in cancer patients? I know I won't do well in the obstetric part. I don't think it is fair to judge me on practices I don't do.**

Certification is not tied to anyone's specific practice but to a standard of knowledge that all certified nurses or NPs in a specific specialty should know. Your maintenance of certification states that you have maintained your knowledge in all the areas of certification not just 1

or 2. Tomorrow, you could accept a position that is just the opposite where you exclusively see obstetric patients and both the employer and regulators assume that NCC is assuring that you have maintained your knowledge competencies in these areas and can make the job change without having to retake your certification examination.

**Q: I'm Maternal Newborn Nursing certified but my hospital requires me to float to the L&D if needed. So I take a lot L&D courses mandated by the hospital. I can use them to maintain my Maternal Newborn Nursing certification, right?**

No, while individual practices may broaden or narrow within the core certification knowledge competencies, the continuing education used for your maintenance must be in your certification specialty. If you now perform significant L&D management, it may be time to consider taking the inpatient obstetric nursing exam if your practice has changed over time.

**Q: I'm no longer working as an inpatient obstetric nurse but I love the area and have maintained even though I don't work in it any more. I hope to return to it one day and I never want to take the certification exam again? What's going to happen to me?**

NCC does not require a work requirement to maintain, but realistically, if you are not working in the area any longer, it would be conceivable that your specialty index would not be as high as someone who does and therefore, your continuing education commitments might be greater. But you still have the opportunity to maintain.

**Q: I don't have access to a computer so you will provide a paper specialty assessment evaluation for me?**

No, to maintain exam security, everyone will have to take the specialty assessment evaluation online. If you don't own a personal computer, your options will be to seek a computer from friends or your employer. There are many venues for computer access such as public libraries or internet cafes. There may be additional fees for some of these services but the cost will have to be borne by the individual certified nurse or NP.

**Q: I won't use the internet for money transactions so how will I participate in this program?**

There is no fee to take the specialty assessment evaluation so that is not an issue.



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## Continuing Competency Initiative

Presorted Standard  
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Oak Brook, IL  
Permit No. 100

# Changes

to the NCC Maintenance Program

# are Here

If you have questions or comments, send them to [continuingcompetency@nccnet.org](mailto:continuingcompetency@nccnet.org).