

Ep #74: Feeling Like You Don't Know Enough



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Sarah Michelle

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Welcome to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*, a show for new NPs and students that want to pass their board exam the first time and make that transition from RN to NP as seamless as possible. I'm your host Sarah Michelle. Now, let's dive into today's episode.

Hey, hey friends. Today I'm going to be discussing a topic that seems to be an almost a universal experience among students taking their exam, as well as new nurse practitioner starting out in practice. And that is the feeling like you don't know enough.

I think we can all agree that at one point or another, either while you're in school or during your AANP or ANCC preparation you may have had a flash of, "I feel like I know nothing." This seems to be a common feeling too in our new nurse practitioners who have worked so long as nurses and now suddenly you're in this entirely new role.

Some students have even said they've felt this way during their exams, which is never a feeling I want you to have. The truth of the matter is of course you know something. Whether it's an exam question or about a patient in your practice, and you have spent years and years in school and clinical putting all the information you have learned to the test.

So you certainly know something about a topic that you're being tested on or asked about in clinic. But when we feel really overwhelmed or we're unsure exactly what we know, it is easy to feel like you know way less than you think you do. This can lead to a lot of panic during your exam and frustration too, as you transition into your nurse practitioner role.

So today I'm going to go through some steps to help overcome that feeling and help you change your mindset in order to be successful not only on your exams, but also as a future real deal nurse practitioner.

I'm first going to tackle the topic of feeling like you know nothing during your exam since I know many programs are graduating in December, which means many of you are likely testing soon. My first tip on changing your mindset from "I don't know enough" to "what do I know about this topic" is to have a plan in place.

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It is almost inevitable that you'll get a question on your exam that is a topic that you're less confident in. Or in the case of those zebra questions that we all hate, something you've never heard of before. And if or when this happens to you, I do not want you to panic.

I want you to have all the tools in place to tackle these questions head on and avoid the panic feeling that can derail your testing process completely. To plan for this I recommend doing as many practice questions as possible, and varying the difficulty level of the questions that you choose.

The SMNP reviews question bank has been designed to mimic the exams with varying levels of difficulty in the questions. But it truly is all about doing as many questions as possible from whatever source so you can test out your strategies.

And so with this in mind, I would highly recommend practicing what you will do when you encounter those difficult questions. When you get to one do not just skip ahead knowing that it is only practice, but really plan out how you will tackle the question as if you were in your real exam. There is no credit given for questions you do not answer, so even guessing is better than leaving it blank, always.

And so what might that plan look like exactly? For me and many of the students that I talk to you, the plan for when difficult questions arise is to dump absolutely everything you know about the topic. This can be a mental process where you just think to yourself everything you know. Or it can be a physical process where you literally dump the knowledge on your blank sheet of scrap paper.

So you get to a question, let's just say it's about preeclampsia, and then you would dump your knowledge. You might start with writing something super simple like pregnancy, and then then maybe that leads you to trimesters in pregnancy, and pregnancy complications. And before you know it, boom, you remember that preeclampsia is high blood pressure in pregnancy and can lead to eclampsia and seizures.

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This technique can help calm your nerves when you're unsure about a topic, and in doing so can sometimes unlock those facts that seem to be deep in our brains. This approach is something that I would practice and see if it works for you. For some people it does and some people it doesn't, it was great for me. And there's really no right or wrong way to go about it. But practicing will help you, again, make that plan to avoid any exam day panic which will always be the goal.

Another approach that I really think is powerful and useful in many aspects of test taking is positive affirmations. The mind is a beyond powerful tool, and positive affirmations can help to continue to change that mindset from, "I don't know enough" to "what do I know about this topic?"

Some of my favorite positive affirmations revolve around doing a review of everything you have done to get up to this point. So maybe you take a second while you're testing to think to yourself, "I passed undergrad. I passed all of my super hard nursing school and nurse practitioner program exams. I've completed hundreds of hours of clinical, I know I can do this. One question does not determine if I pass or fail, nor if I'm going to be a good nurse practitioner someday."

And friends, all of those positive affirmations are not only helpful to changing your mindset when it comes to difficult questions, but they're true. If you're sitting for AANP or ANCC, the work that you have put in to get there has been massive. Don't underestimate it. You have gone through a BS or BSN program, an MSM, maybe even DNP or PhD. You have done so many clinical hours, you can get through a tough question. I know you can.

Another important piece of information to remember when you're testing is that the exam is only making sure that you are going to be a safe novice, emphasis on the word novice here, nurse practitioner. You are absolutely not expected to know every question.

Both exams are going to have questions that do not count towards your score. And overall, you only need about a 70% to pass whether you're

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taking ANCC or AANP. Keeping this in mind can also be helpful during your exam, especially when you get to those tough questions that you may not know.

During your exam is one time that the I know nothing feeling may creep in, but another time that is super common for this to happen is those first days, weeks, and months of nurse practitioner practice and being on your own. Transitioning from being a nurse to being a nurse practitioner is huge.

It is not only almost a complete change of career, but the role and responsibilities of being a nurse practitioner versus when you were a nurse are entirely different. You're more than likely going to find yourself in situations where you're not 100% sure of what tests to run, what questions to ask, or providers to refer out to.

And in times like this it is incredibly important to once again try and shift your mindset. And remember, everyone starts somewhere. Learning to utilize your resources and trust your training and all of your education will be essential to overcoming this feeling and growing from being a novice nurse practitioner to a confident provider.

There are a few tips that I think are essential to overcoming this feeling in practice and helping to guide you on your nurse practitioner journey. The first step here for when you feel like you're totally lost, and you don't know enough as a new nurse practitioner is to honor that feeling. It is okay to not know everything. Just like your exams, you are never expected to know at all, and especially not as a new grad nurse practitioner.

The important piece is that you do not try and ignore this feeling, and instead you seek out help to get the information you need. The people you work with as a new grad can be great resources. And they were once new too, so they usually completely understand all of the feelings and emotions that come along with being in a new role.

This is also something I feel is super important to ask about in an initial interview for that first NP role. Ask how that office or clinic is going to

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support you as you grow into this new role, and you evolve. And ask them what resources they have available to help this transition.

If you are in a full independent practice state, this is even more important because you do not want to enter a role where you are lacking resources as you become acclimated to becoming a nurse practitioner.

Another way to avoid feeling like you know nothing in those early days of practice is to seek out educational opportunities. Medicine, as we know, is ever changing. And as nurse practitioners we really do dedicate our lives and practice to continuing to grow and learn. In doing so you can affirm what you do know and learn different approaches to practice to grow that educational base.

We all know there are different continuing education and contact hour requirements to maintain certification under AANP or ANCC, but beyond those I really challenge you as a new nurse practitioner to seek out this education, specifically the education you need to feel confident. There are so many online resources and courses you can take as well as national conferences to attend, both virtual and in person, where they are covering the latest and greatest innovations in the medical field.

These are not only great ways to maintain your certification and your license of course, but they are significant opportunities to expand your knowledge base and network with other nurse practitioners and build a support base for yourself.

Many times your workplace will even provide you with funding for these opportunities. And so I highly, highly recommend that you take full advantage of them and don't overlook them.

The final way as a new nurse practitioner in practice I would like to highlight as a way to avoid feeling like you don't know enough is to connect with other new nurse practitioners. According to AANP there are over 30,000 new nurse practitioners completing their programs yearly. Which means you are far from alone as a new nurse practitioner.

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You may be lucky enough to be joining a workplace with another new provider, which can be a great connection and resource in those early days. But even if you only work with experienced providers, I would definitely find a new provider community to connect with.

Connecting with other new nurse practitioners and sharing ways to overcome that newbie feeling, that feeling like you don't know enough can help you to combat that feeling. And also grow your own network of professional connections.

There are many ways to do this, whether it's a conference, a workshop, online, whatever works best for you. And we know that our SMNP Reviews community has a great new nurse practitioner Facebook group where I'm constantly amazed at the camaraderie and support that goes on.

And so there you have it, my friends, when you feel like you don't know enough, whether it's during your exams or during practice, I truly, truly want you to know that you absolutely do know something. And actually you know quite a bit.

During your exams, be sure to utilize those test taking strategies that you have practiced. And when you're new to practice, be sure to reach out when you need help and seek out those further educational opportunities. In either case, wherever you are in your NP journey, know that you are never alone, and you're never expected to know at all. Know that you all have my full confidence and support, always. And we'll talk again next week.

As an extra bonus, friends, if you're looking for support, no matter what phase of your nurse practitioner journey that you're currently in, I have communities available for both students and new nurse practitioners. In these communities we work to uplift one another and grow this profession together every single day. Links to join will be included for you in the show notes.

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Thanks for listening to *Becoming a Stress-Free Nurse Practitioner*. If you want more information about the different types of support we offer to students and new NPs, visit stressfreenp.com. See you next week.