

Ep #171: ANCC FNP Exam Updates: What's Changing & What's Not



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Anna Miller

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Anna: Welcome to the *Real Deal Nurse Practitioner Club*, the podcast for nurses who are ready to pass their boards and thrive in their careers as real deal nurse practitioners. I'm Anna, and I'm the Director of Nursing Content at Blueprint Test Prep. Whether you're deep in exam prep or stepping into practice, I've got you. It is time to become the confident, knowledgeable NP that you're meant to be. Let's dive in.

Hey everyone, welcome back. I'm Anna.

Alex: And I'm Alex.

Anna: And today we're talking about something that has started to light up our inboxes, our Facebook group, honestly, our team Slack, and that is that the ANCC has officially announced updates to the FNP certification exam that's going to take effect on October 30th.

And whenever the boards announce changes, people's first reaction is usually like, wait, does this change everything? Do I need all new study materials? Should I be panicking? And even if the answer to that is no, they panic anyways. And so today, we are going to answer all of those questions. We're going to talk through what we actually know, kind of what we're inferring from the new blueprint and the reference list, and most importantly, hopefully, take your anxiety level down a few notches.

Alex: Because if you're anything like most NP students, just hearing the phrase exam update can absolutely make your stomach drop. But honestly, this is normal. Certification exams aren't meant to stay frozen forever, right? Healthcare changes, evidence changes, clinical practice changes, and so every few years, organizations like the ANCC go back and ask, what does an entry level nurse practitioner actually need to know today to practice safely? And that's exactly what this update is. It's not a surprise and it's definitely not something that should make you feel like all of your studying shouldn't count.

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Anna: Yeah, I think that's one of the biggest things I want to talk about first. I think people sometimes just like imagine this room or some random person decides, we are completely rewriting the whole exam. But that's really not how this works, I promise. ANCC performs what's called a role delineation or practice analysis.

And so they are gathering information from practicing NPs across the country to really understand what new grads are actually doing in practice, and then they use that information to update the exam blueprint. Like these updates aren't random, and they don't typically come with super drastic changes, but they're just designed to make sure the exam continues to reflect safe, entry level NP practice as the landscape just evolves naturally over time. And honestly, it's a really good thing.

Alex: Exactly. Imagine if certification exams never changed. We'd still be testing recommendations that aren't current anymore. Healthcare evolves, our medications evolve, technology evolves, and the role of nurse practitioners also evolves, right? So the exam should too.

Anna: All right, let's talk about what we actually know. The good news is that not as much changed as people might expect. The overall structure of the exam is exactly the same. There are still 175 total questions, 150 of those are scored, and then there are 25 pre-test questions. Of course, we don't know what 25 those are. Same thing.

And then we still have the same major content domains that are assessment, diagnosing, planning, implementation, and evaluation. And so right away, that is reassuring. This is not a brand new exam. It is the same exact framework, just with some updates.

Alex: Yeah, and probably the biggest blueprint change is that implementation is receiving a little more weight. Assessment and evaluation both decreased ever so slightly to make room for that increase. Now, we don't think that means assessment suddenly isn't important. So

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that's far from it, right? You still have to know how to assess patients and interpret the findings.

But it does suggest that the ANCC may be putting a little more emphasis on what happens after you've gathered all that assessment information, right? So what do you actually do with it? What is your management plan? How do you choose the best intervention? How do you educate the patient? How do you think through clinical decision-making? Those are all things that fall into implementation.

Anna: Yeah, I will say one thing that definitely caught our attention was some of the new language that was added to the blueprint too, right? Like a few questions, like Alex said, are going to shift, but again, this is like a few questions worth. This is not like a substantial amount of the exam. But some of the new language, ANCC now specifically mentions things like technology in healthcare, artificial intelligence, ethical use of information systems, and expanded legal and regulatory considerations. Okay, and now before everyone thinks, like just pause here, before you think like, great, I have to become an AI expert, that is not what this means.

Alex: Exactly. They are definitely not expecting you to write computer codes, right? They're recognizing something that's already happening in healthcare. Providers are using electronic health records, clinical decision support tools, voice recognition software, even AI tools are starting to become part of clinical practice in the chart, right?

So boards are essentially saying like, as future nurse practitioners, you need to understand how to use this technology responsibly. So that means thinking about privacy, HIPAA, ethics, bias, documentation, knowing when technology is helpful, but also when your own clinical judgment has to take priority.

Anna: Exactly. And again, some of these things are already asked about on the ANCC exam. That is why we cover technology and HIPAA and all of those things in our courses. They're just calling it out a little bit more

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specifically on the blueprint. And then another thing is that the reference list also gets updated when they make these exam updates.

And honestly, it's exactly what we'd expect for most of it. It's just newer editions of textbooks, updated pharmacology resources, updated primary care text. So there's nothing really shocking there, but there were two additions that kind of stood out to me. One was a nursing informatics textbook was added, and then the other was an advanced pharmacotherapeutics reference. And again, these really just kind of fit exactly with those blueprint changes that we called out. Technology, clinical decision making, prescribing, safe implementation. All of that really points in the same direction there.

Alex: Now, here's where we want to be careful, right? Because we don't have actual exam items. We don't know exactly how the ANCC will write individual questions. So everything we're saying beyond the published blueprint is just based on educated interpretation. What we think this means is that the exam may just become a little more focused on application rather than simple recall. So maybe a little more emphasis on clinical management, maybe a little more emphasis on choosing the next best step, right, instead of just simply identifying the diagnosis. But those are informed assumptions, right? They're not confirmed facts.

Anna: Yeah, and honestly, that's really already the direction that certification exams have been moving for years, whether it's ANCC, AANP, or really like healthcare education in general, the trend has consistently been toward clinical reasoning, not just memorizing isolated facts. Like, can you actually recognize the patterns? Can you prioritize care? Can you make safe decisions? That's really what boards are trying to measure.

And so I want to answer the question that everyone asks when these updates happen, and it's should you completely change how you're studying? And the answer to that is no. If you have been using a high quality board review course that is grounded in current evidence and it is focused on clinical reasoning, you are already building the skills that this

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exam is testing. All of a sudden, it's not like all of your patients coming into primary care have new diagnoses that you've never heard of, right? The foundations of primary care did not suddenly change overnight.

Alex: Exactly. Don't throw away your study schedule. Don't buy 10 different review books because someone on social media said the exam is totally different. Newsflash, it's not. The biggest thing you can do is keep focusing on understanding why an answer is correct instead of memorizing isolated facts. That's what prepares you for any blueprint update.

Anna: Yeah, and if you are using our courses and our resources, one, we are constantly keeping our courses up to date. If you all didn't know, the exams tend to be a little bit behind practice guidelines because they only update every few years. And so guidelines are constantly changing and it takes a while for that to reflect. And so as soon as things update in real life, we kind of give you both answers in our courses because we want you to know what's been tested on historically, but what could be tested on in the future and what to expect to be a safe NP in practice.

And then, of course, as soon as updates are released, like our team for months has been comparing the old and the new blueprints. We've been reviewing the reference list. We have identified any places where our content needs to be refreshed. And one thing we have really, really taken seriously is just always keeping things current. We know healthcare changes, guidelines change, certification exams change and our courses change too. And that's really always been a part of our philosophy. And so if you've been using them, you are ready.

Alex: And honestly, this is one of those behind the scenes things that most learners never see, right? Like this is what I do all day every day. We're constantly reviewing the guideline updates. We're monitoring the certification organizations. We're looking at testing trends, making revisions long before most people even realize that something has even changed. So that's part of our job. So you can focus on learning instead of wondering if you're studying the right material.

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Anna: Yeah, and that's why our courses are going to prepare you whether you're taking the AANP or the old ANCC or the new ANCC, you are going to be ready if you have put in the work and you have done the practice questions. All right, let's wrap everything up.

So remember, ANCC exam for FNP is being updated on October 30th. Again, implementation, we think is going to get a little bit more emphasis. It has a slightly higher percentage there. Technology, AI, informatics, legal, ethical considerations, they're all becoming just a little bit more explicit.

But again, the ANCC has been testing on these already. They're just calling it out now. And then the reference list has been modernized with newer additions and a few new resources that really support those overall themes. But overall, this is really just an evolution. It is not a complete overall of the exam.

Alex: And hopefully that's your biggest takeaway today. So don't let an exam update shake your confidence. You're preparing to become a safe, competent new nurse practitioner, not just to pass one version of a certification exam. If you build strong clinical reasoning skills, understand the why behind patient care, and practice applying that knowledge, you will be well prepared regardless of small blueprint changes.

Anna: Yeah, and the exam, it's going to realize that they have this flux and this new edition. They're not going to be testing you with two correct answers. They're not going to give you like a relatively recent but slightly outdated guideline and then a newer guideline and have you pick between the two. Okay, it is going to be either correct or incorrect. And as always, if you're looking for more structured board prep, we'd love to have you join us. So check out our certification review courses, our primary care Qbank.

And in our Qbank, you can even work through questions with Blue, our AI tutor that uses, it uses like Socratic questioning just to help prompt you how to think through the question. We have our live study group, our one on one sessions. All of this can be found at npreviews.com.

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And don't forget to join our free Facebook community and follow us on Instagram @smnpreviewsofficial where we continue to share updates as we learn more about these exam changes. But thank you so much for listening as always and remember, you are capable, you are making progress and you've got this.

Alex: We'll see you next time on the *Real Deal Nurse Practitioner Club*.

Thanks for listening to another episode of the *Real Deal Nurse Practitioner Club*. If you want more information about the different types of support that we offer to students and new nurse practitioners, you can visit npreviews, with an S, dot com. We'll see you next week.