

To: Physician's Assistants Eligible for Recertification

From: Clara E. Vanderbilt, PA-C *Clara Vanderbilt*
AAPA Representative to the NCCPA

Fellow PA's:

I have been disturbed to learn that so many of you who are eligible for recertification have not yet registered for the recertification examination. I gather from the numerous phone calls I have had that this is due mainly to the short, and apparently sudden, notice of the examination, and to the fee.

As to the timing of the notice, in all fairness we have know for sometime that our recertification would be coming up at this time. As early as 1971, before any of us even took the original certifying exam, Dr. Malcolm Todd of the AMA was stressing the need for periodic recertification of PA's if the profession was to enjoy the support of his organization. This attitude has been continuously supported by the AAPA leadership also since 1972 when Mr. Bill Stanhope started attending meetings of the AMA Council on Health Manpower as a guest, and later became one of the first group of Academy representatives on the NCCPA. The NCCPA itself has tried to keep PA's abreast of their intention regarding recertification since November 1975 (see enclosed material).

It is unfortunate that we received our letters only 3 weeks before the deadline for filing our applications. I must assume some of the responsibility for that. Since November 1978, when I was first appointed as an AAPA representative to the NCCPA, I have sent reports and questionnaires both to constituent chapter presidents and for publication in various newsletters. Since only a handfull of the self-addressed stamped envelopes and questionnaires were returned I have had to use my own discretion where there was no policy established by the Academy. On October 27, 1980 I, along with the other Academy representatives voted to give the examination before June 1, 1981 which was the date on which all our current certification expires. This was done partly to ensure the status of those PA's practicing in states which require current certification. The NCCPA staff was then faced with contacting PA Programs and other test site centers to negotiate a date on which they could all give the exam, after which they had to have the brochures printed and mailed. In retrospect perhaps our reasoning about the timing was faulty, however we acted at the time in what we thought was the best interest of the profession.

The cost of recertification is another factor causing unhappiness. I, too, am unhappy about paying \$165.00. However, we were presented the data on the cost out of giving the exam, verifying applications and CME, NBME cost etc., at the B.O.D. meeting of the NCCPA in October and none of us could find items which we could successfully challenge.

Perhaps if we had allowed the administration at the annual conference of the examination in 1979 or more actively supported the testing of the exam for recertification purposes at the 1980 conference, we could have gathered data which we are now gathering with recertification.

Despite your aggravations there is still a vital reason for signing up at this time. Let me try to put it into an historical perspective. In 1968, the AMA Council on Health Manpower began studying the possibility of alleviating the shortage of physicians by using physician's assistants. In April 1971 the American Society of Internal Medicine, American Academy of Family Physicians, American Academy of Pediatrics and the American College of Physicians, after polling their membership to document their attitudes toward PA's, provided the AMA Council with a list of functions which they would be willing to delegate. The AMA, along with these specialists, drafted educational standards or "essentials" for the primary care PA's. When the AMA House of Delegates approved those guidelines they also adopted a proposal that directed the Council on Health Manpower in cooperation with other appropriate organizations to assume a leadership role in developing and sponsoring a national program for the certification of the assistant to the primary care physician. In April 1972 the AMA Board of Trustees approved a recommendation from the Council that it begin collaboration with the NBME to develop the exam. This support by the AMA House of Delegates for the essentials for the accreditation of educational programs and for certification for PA's was a major and perhaps the major factor in our early rapid growth. The support we received at that time was forthcoming because organized medicine perceived that we were an asset rather than a threat to their practice. The legislation that permits and regulates PA's in all but a few states was passed as much by their influence as by our own efforts.

Recently, however, some of our staunchest supporters have had some second thoughts. The Graduate Medical Education National Advisory Committee (GMENAC) report has indicated, in contradiction to what we thought in 1968-72, that there will be a surplus of physicians in the U.S. by the end of the decade. The AMA House of Delegates has recently decided to reconsider their stance on PA's in light of this report and the AAFP is also wavering.

The organizations that gave us our original support, together with such influential organizations as the American College of Surgeons, and the Federation of State Medical Examiners, are the ones that make up the Board of Directors of the NCCPA. To threaten the existence of the NCCPA, (as inadequate participation in the recertification process will, if only for budgetary reasons), will threaten the perception that these groups have of the PA profession. This is one of the most critical times for our profession. If we can weather the next few years of health manpower uncertainty we will be established and secure; a major setback at this time can still shatter what we have all worked so hard to accomplish.

There is also an ethical issue. We have used the promise of recertification in our quest for legitimacy including legislation. To refuse to participate in the recertification process when it's time to put-up or shut-up is, I believe, immoral. For all these reasons I beg you to return your application today and if you disagree with the process become active to change the process.