



CMSRN[®]

Recertification Handbook



CMSRN® Recertification Handbook

All information is subject to change without notice, including test content, fees, and policies.

Last Updated: July 2026



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Introduction

About the CMSRN®

CMSRN is accredited by ABSNC

The CMSRN® exam was granted accreditation by the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC) in January 2009 and has maintained accreditation to date.

CMSRN® is accepted for Magnet Recognition Program®

The **Magnet Recognition Program®** from the American Nurses' Credentialing Center (ANCC) is recognized worldwide as a program that healthcare organizations join to promote nursing excellence. The CMSRN is a certification that Magnet-recognized and Magnet-applicant organizations may report in the Demographic Data Collection Tool® (DDCT) to become or stay a Magnet® organization.

CMSRN® is endorsed by AMSN

The Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSN) is the only national professional nursing specialty organization dedicated to the practice of medical-surgical nursing. The CMSRN is the only medical-surgical certification endorsed by AMSN.

About this Handbook

The CMSRN® Recertification Handbook provides essential information about recertification of the Certified Medical-Surgical Registered Nurse (CMSRN®) credential from the Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board (MSNCB).

We encourage you, the CMSRN® certificant, to read through each section carefully. You are responsible for following all policies and procedures in this handbook. Failure to follow all policies and procedures may result in denial, suspension, or revocation of certification and the forfeiture of your recertification application fees.

MSNCB Policies

Please see **MSNCB Certification Policies** for a list of policies from MSNCB that are relevant to CMSRN® certificants. Policies covered pertain to ethics, general administration, initial certification, and recertification. These policies are not directly referenced in this handbook, but they were used in its creation.

Non-Discrimination Statement

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

Maintain your records

MSNCB will retain electronic records of all certificants for at least five (5) years. It is your professional responsibility to notify MSNCB of any change in name, mailing address, phone number, and email address during your certification period. This information must be kept current within the **Certification Portal** to ensure accurate communication and record keeping.

Code of Ethics

All certificants seeking recertification through MSNCB are expected to uphold high standards of ethical and professional conduct throughout their certification cycle and the recertification process.

- By submitting a recertification application, certificants agree to:
- Act honestly, fairly, and with integrity in all interactions with MSNCB
- Provide accurate, complete, and truthful information

- Comply with all MSNCB policies, procedures, and applicable laws and regulations
- Act in a way that supports and upholds the reputation of MSNCB and the medical-surgical nursing profession

Failure to comply with this Code of Ethics, including falsification of information or noncompliance with recertification or audit requirements, may result in denial of recertification, revocation of certification, or other actions as determined by MSNCB policy.

Revocation, denial, or suspension of credential

MSNCB considers misrepresentation or noncompliance with certification policies or misuse of the CMSRN credential serious issues that require investigation and possible disciplinary or legal action. If certification is denied, suspended, or revoked for any reason, no fee will be refunded.

MSNCB may revoke, deny, or suspend certification for causes including but not limited to:

- Falsifying information on the exam or recertification application
- Falsifying any supporting documentation requested by MSNCB
- Suspected pre-knowledge of test content
- Impersonating another person to take the exam
- Cheating on the exam or any other evidence of compromising the exam
- Sharing exam knowledge with others
- Misrepresentation or fraudulent use of the CMSRN credential, such as using the CMSRN designation after your credential has expired

Know Your Certification Timeline

Certification period is for five years

The CMSRN credential is valid for five (5) years. You may submit your recertification application starting in the fourth year of your certification period (12 months prior to your certification expiration date).

Recertify during your grace period

If you are unable to recertify before your certification expiration date, you have until the end of the 30-day grace period following your certification expiration date to recertify.

Alternatives to recertification

If you are unable to complete recertification for any reason, you can apply for Inactive Status. Inactive Status is a one-time career option that grants an additional three (3) years to recertify. Upon entering Inactive Status, you cannot use the CMSRN distinction.

If you have retired within your certification period, you can apply for Emeritus Status.

Choose How to Recertify

There are two pathways to recertify. You can recertify by contact hours or recertify by exam.

Plan your recertification pathway early

Decide early in your certification period whether you will recertify by contact hours or by exam. If you choose contact hours, you'll need to earn and track them throughout your five-year certification period. If you plan to recertify by exam, schedule your exam well before your expiration date to allow adequate preparation time and avoid a lapse in certification.

Engage in ongoing professional development regardless of your pathway

The following activities support lifelong learning and may count toward your contact hours:

- Completing continuing education
- Precepting or mentoring new RNs
- Enrolling in an academic nursing program
- Conducting research or evidence-based practice projects
- Presenting posters at conferences
- Serving on the committees of national nursing organizations

Recertify by Contact Hours

Our most popular method of recertification is recertification by contact hours. Contact hours can be earned by completing continuing education and professional activities. You will document those activities in your **recertification application**, which opens as soon as you become certified.

Four eligibility requirements to recertify by contact hours

You are eligible to apply for recertification by contact hours if you meet the following criteria:

- 1. CMSRN status.** Hold a current CMSRN certification that expires within one year or that expired less than 30 days ago
- 2. RN License.** Hold an unencumbered and current license as a Registered Nurse (RN) in the United States or its territories
 - A nursing license held outside the United States must be verified for equivalency by the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS)
- 3. Hours of practice.** Have accrued 1,000 practice hours in a medical-surgical setting during your 5-year certification period. Practice may be as a clinical nurse, as a manager, or as an educator
 - Alternatively, you may also submit documentation signed by a school official verifying full-time status and matriculation as an RN student in a nursing baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degree program
- 4. Contact hours.** Have earned ninety (90) verified contact hours during your 5-year certification period. Sixty-eight (68) contact hours must be related to medical-surgical nursing

Contact Hours at a Glance

- **Total required:** Ninety (90) verified contact hours per certification period
 - At least sixty-eight (68) hours must be designated as Medical-Surgical
 - Up to twenty-two (22) hours may be designated as Professional Development
- **Eligible activities:** Contact hours may be earned through continuing education, precepting or mentoring, academic coursework, presentations, publications, conference posters, multimedia programs, research or evidence-based practice projects, and approved volunteer service.
- **Submission and documentation:** Contact hours are entered directly into your recertification application. Supporting documentation must be retained and submitted with your application.
- **Accrual period:** Contact hours must be earned during your applicable accrual period, which may change if you apply during your grace period.

For full details on eligible activities, category-specific limits, documentation requirements, and designation guidance, refer to [Appendix A](#).

Pro-tip: enter contact hours as you earn them

We highly recommend that you enter your continuing education activities on a regular basis, at least once a year. This will help you keep track of your progress towards meeting recertification requirements and will save time when it comes to submitting your application.

Start submitting credits in the [Certification Portal](#) now!

Recertify by Exam

You can choose to take the exam again to recertify if it is your preference or you haven't earned enough contact hours during your accrual period. Details on exam accommodations, scheduling, and testing policies are available in the [CMSRN® Certification Handbook](#).

Three eligibility requirements to recertify by exam

1. Hold a current CMSRN certification that expires within one year or expired less than 30 days ago
2. Hold an unencumbered and current license as a Registered Nurse (RN) in the United States or its territories
 - A nursing license held outside the United States must be verified for equivalency by the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS)
3. Have accrued 1,000 practice hours in a medical-surgical setting during your 5-year certification period. Practice may be as a clinical nurse, as a manager, or as an educator
 - Alternatively, you may also submit documentation signed by a school official verifying full-time status and matriculation as an RN student in a nursing baccalaureate, master's or doctoral degree program

Apply for recertification in four steps!

Confirm your eligibility for your chosen recertification method (contact hours or exam) and:

✓	1. Enter your RN license details and medical-surgical work experience from the past five years
✓	2. Submit required information and upload supporting documentation: a) Self-report contact hours and upload supporting documentation, or b) Select the exam pathway, if applicable. Your application defaults to the Contact Hours pathway. Click the three-dot icon next to Recertification Pathway, then select Change My Answer and choose Apply by Exam
✓	3. Review and submit your recertification application anytime in the last year of your certification period through the Certification Portal
✓	4. Pay the required fees and await your recertification decision

For step-by-step instructions with visual aids, refer to the [Recertification Application User Guide](#).

[Go to the certification portal](#)

Fees

Recertification application fees and fees for alternatives to recertification are due at the time you submit your application. Applying for a [CMSRN Recertification Grant](#) can help cover the costs of recertification and [FailSafe](#) vouchers can apply as well.

Please note that all fees are subject to change without notice.

Recertification Application Fees

	AMSN Member Fee	Standard Fee
Recertify by Contact Hours	\$225	\$325
Retake Exam	\$267	\$394

- The recertification fees are non-refundable, even if you decline or fail the audit.
- Applications submitted during the 30-day grace period are assessed a late fee of \$90.

Fees for Alternatives to Recertification

	AMSN Member Fee	Standard Fee
Inactive Status	\$105	\$165
Emeritus Status	\$75	\$100

Applications for Inactive Status and Emeritus Status are also accepted during the 30-day grace period.

Application Audits

MSNCB performs a random audit of 10% of all recertification applications. The fees for recertification are non-refundable, even if you decline or fail the recertification audit.

If you are selected for audit, you will be notified via email. There are three outcomes of an audit:

- Immediate denial for falsification of information or supporting documentation
- Approval with the satisfaction of recertification requirements
- Approval or denial following the submission of inquiries from the CMSRN Recertification Committee

A member of the CMSRN Recertification Committee will contact you within ten (10) days of audit selection if your recertification application is deficient. If the auditors find that any of your contact hours are not acceptable, you will have thirty (30) days from the date of notification to respond to their inquiries and/or submit additional entries. Inquiries may be submitted up to three (3) times before the application is denied.

The certificant will have thirty (30) days from the date of notification to respond to each inquiry and may be provided up to three total rounds of inquiry to resolve deficiencies.

Failure to respond to audit inquiries within the required timeframe will result in denial of the audit in accordance with MSNCB policy.

Appeal MSNCB decisions

If you are denied certification or your credential is revoked or suspended, you may appeal the decision in certain circumstances. All eligible appeals must be filed within thirty (30) days of notification of denial, revocation, or suspension or the right to appeal is forfeit.

Eligible for appeals:

- Denial of eligibility for the certification exam
- Denial of eligibility for recertification by contact hours
- Denial of credit for contact hours
- Insufficient contact hours due to catastrophic natural or personal events.
- Revocation of certification

Ineligible for appeals:

- Failure to complete the certification exam in the time allotted
- The validity of a specific test item
- Failure to meet deadline dates for supporting documentation, audit requests, or any other requests by MSNCB
- Action against the individual's credential due to disciplinary action of the RN license by a licensing authority
- Failure to receive recertification notice. It is your responsibility to apply for recertification and notify MSNCB of any change in name, address, or contact information
- Failure to recertify by your certification expiration date

Alternatives to Recertification

The options to apply for Emeritus Status or Inactive Status are also available in your recertification application.

Emeritus Status

The Emeritus designation is intended both to recognize CMSRN certified nurses' years of service caring for patients and their families, and to acknowledge their dedication to having been certified. Retirement from nursing practice can take place for many reasons including illness or disability, career change or choice. Many nurses would like to stay connected, no matter what path they choose. Emeritus status is a point on a career map that allows nurses to demonstrate their professional value.

Upon entering Emeritus status, you must adopt the use of "CMSRN®-Emeritus" when listing your credentials.

Apply for Emeritus status

1. Hold a current CMSRN credential or be within the 30-day grace period following expiration.
2. Have retired within your five (5) year current certification period
3. Submit your application for Emeritus status before the expiration of your current certification or within your 30-day grace period

Reinstate the CMSRN if you rejoin the work force

If you are an Emeritus Status nurse who re-enters the workforce within three (3) years from the date you received Emeritus status and you wish to reinstate the full CMSRN credential, you must meet eligibility criteria to recertify by contact hours with a lapsed CMSRN credential, submit the application, and pay all appropriate fees.

If approved, your new certification period will be effective for five (5) years from time of reinstatement.

If you wish to reinstate your CMSRN after three (3) years of Emeritus status, you will need to retake and pass the CMSRN certification exam.

Inactive Status

CMSRN certified nurses with current certifications who are unable to meet the continuing education or practice requirements may apply for Inactive Status. If approved, Inactive Status will be granted for a three (3) year period only and is a one-time career option.

Upon entering Inactive Status, you must cease use of the CMSRN® designation when listing your credentials.

Apply for Inactive status

1. Hold a current CMSRN credential or be within the 30-day grace period following expiration.
2. Submit an Inactive Status application, which includes the appropriate fee and statement detailing the reasons for the request.
 - a. Applications for Inactive Status must be submitted prior to the end of the 30-day grace period.

Reactivate the CMSRN within three years

To reactivate your certification, you must meet eligibility criteria to recertify by contact hours with a lapsed CMSRN credential, submit the application, and pay all appropriate fees.

If approved, your new certification period will be effective for five (5) years from the time of reactivation.

If you wish to reinstate your CMSRN after three (3) years of Inactive status, you will need to retake and pass the CMSRN certification exam.

Use and Verification of the CMSRN

The CMSRN mark is federally registered with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. Nurses certified for the CMSRN by MSNCB may use the following in all correspondence or professional relations:

CMSRN® — Certified Medical-Surgical Registered Nurse

As a CMSRN, you'll want proof of your accomplishment. Current and potential employers will also want to verify certifications. Below are the options available to you and your employer.

Digital Badges

Digital badges are credible and quick

A digital badge is an online representation of your CMSRN certification. It is a credible source and a quick method of verifying your certification. Digital badges can be shared through social media, and they can be added to your email signature. They inform your peers and employers of the knowledge, skills, and competencies you have within your professional practice.

Verify your credential with a digital badge

You will receive an email about claiming your digital badge 1-2 weeks after your recertification is approved. Share your digital badge with current or potential employers as proof of your certification. If you do not receive your email, you may email us at msncb@msncb.org to obtain your digital badge.

Verification

Third-party verification available for purchase upon request

Employers or other third parties may request independent verification of a certificant's CMSRN credential. Verification requests are submitted by an employer or other third party through the Certification Portal.

Each verification request costs \$25 per certificant and generates a signed letter on MSNCB letterhead. The letter includes the certificant's name, certification number, and certification start and end dates. Verification letters are approved by the MSNCB Certification Director.

Verification is only available for active certificants. Expired or non-certified individuals cannot be verified.

For guidance on setting up an organizational account, contact certification@msncb.org.

Appendix A: Contact Hours Guide

Contact hours are credits earned by engaging in activities related to medical-surgical nursing and professional development. The following is a list of eligible activities which may be used to earn contact hours. You do not need to earn contact hours in every activity. There is a maximum number of contact hours you may earn for each activity.

Enter contact hours directly into your application

You submit your contact hours directly into your application if you are recertifying by contact hours.

Watch this [Instructional Video](#) for detailed instructions on how to upload contact hours.

Designate contact hours as Medical-Surgical or Professional Development

Every activity you submit in your application must be designated as either Medical-Surgical or Professional Development.

How to Designate: Medical-Surgical or Professional Development?

Medical-Surgical Contact Hours must be related to the specialty of medical-surgical nursing and direct patient care. Medical-Surgical contact hours are also called specialty contact hours. Medical-Surgical excludes psychiatry, obstetrics, gynecology, and pediatrics. Example topics include: sepsis, cardiac care, diabetes management, pain management, wound care

Professional Development Contact Hours are related to the broader area of health care and general nursing. Professional Development includes nursing informatics and theory, ethics, leadership, and more. Example topics include: nursing informatics, ethics, leadership, communication, and healthcare systems.

Medical-Surgical Contact Hours	Professional Development Contact Hours
Applicable to adult medical-surgical nursing practice and includes continuing education with content specific to medical-surgical nursing and includes: • Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS), accepted once per certification period • CME credits when the content applies to medical-surgical nursing • Preceptorship or mentorship involving one-on-one clinical supervision in a clinical setting • Academic courses related to medical-surgical nursing • Presentations focused on medical-surgical nursing practice • Publications related to medical-surgical nursing practice • Conference posters focused on medical-surgical nursing practice • Multimedia programs related to medical-surgical nursing • Research or evidence-based practice projects focused on medical-surgical patient care • Volunteer service on the AMSN Clinical Practice Committee or AMSN Legislative Committee • Volunteer service on MSNCB Test Development, MSNCB Recertification Committee, and Task Force activities	Activities related to broader health care or general nursing practice that support professional growth, which may apply across nursing roles, specialties, and care settings and includes: • Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS), accepted once per certification period • Topics such as leadership, ethics, informatics, education, and nursing theory • Continuing education with non-specialty or general nursing content • Academic courses related to general nursing practice or professional development topics • Presentations focused on professional development topics • Publications related to general nursing practice or professional issues • Conference posters related to professional development topics • Multimedia programs related to general nursing or professional development • Research or evidence-based practice projects focused on professional development or broader nursing practice • All other AMSN Volunteer Unit service not designated as specialty practice
Example of Medical-Surgical Contact Hours courses include but are not limited to: • Cardiology: Shortness of Breath • Diabetes Mellitus: A Life-Changing Disease • Pain Assessment in Special Populations • Sepsis in the Adult Patient	Examples of Professional Development Contact Hours courses include but are not limited to: • Burnout and Resilience • Informatics Systems Training • 2026 Legal Update • Solving Team Dysfunctions • Topics on psychiatry, obstetrics, gynecology, or pediatrics

Contact Hour Categories

Each category section below includes instructions on how to convert the activity into contact hours and the maximum number of contact hours you may earn for each activity (Convert), whether the activity can be designated Medical-Surgical or Professional Development (Designation), what you will need to enter the activity in your application (Submit), and any other pertinent information or frequently asked questions.

Activity	Description	Contact Hours (CH) Conversion Max NH	Designation	Documentation
Continuing Education <i>See note below for additional guidelines.</i>	Accredited nursing continuing professional development (NCPD) activities relevant to medical-surgical nursing or professional development.	1 NCPD = 1 CH 90 CH max 1 CME = 1 CH 45 CH max	MS or PD	Certificates must include your name, date, name of program, number of contact hours, and accreditation statement. AMSN courses will prepopulate in your application.
Preceptor/Mentor	One-on-one clinical supervision of a baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral nursing student and/or newly hired nurse. Must provide medical-surgical focused clinical supervision to baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degree students or newly hired nurses.	6 hours = 1 CH 20 CH max	MS	Precepting form completed by school or nurse manager. Download the Preceptor/Mentor Verification Form to submit.
Academic Courses	Courses completed while enrolled in an accredited baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degree program.	1 credit = 15 CH 75 CH max	MS or PD	Must include an unofficial transcript from the program.

Presentations	One-on-one clinical supervision of a baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral nursing student and/or newly hired nurse. Must provide medical-surgical focused clinical supervision to baccalaureate, master's, or doctoral degree students or newly hired nurses.	1 hour = 3 CH 45 CH max	MS or PD	Presentation materials or outline.
Publications	Author, co-author, or editor of a book, book chapter, or published article. Article must be a manuscript or research paper, and any publication must be published by a recognized publisher or professional journal.	Book = 25 CH Chapter = 10 CH Article = 5 CH 25 CH max	MS or PD	Copy or citation of publication.
Conference Poster	The poster must be relevant to medical-surgical nursing and presented at a regional or national meeting.	1 poster = 5 CH 20 CH max	MS or PD	Conference documentation of poster.
Multimedia Program	Proof of multimedia content; development of educational media (e.g., videos, modules, online learning content) for healthcare audiences	1 poster = 5 CH 20 CH max	MS or PD	Conference documentation of poster.

Research and Evidence-Based Projects	Research project approved by the Investigational Review Board (IRB) of a healthcare facility in which you are one of the primary investigators. Must include the research proposal submitted to the IRB facility in recertification application. Evidence-based practice projects that have been given exempt status by the IRB or have been implemented in your healthcare facility and are reflected in its policies, procedures, or clinical guidelines. You must have been involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the project.	Research = 30 CH EBP = 15 CH 30 CH max	MS or PD	Project documentation, including proof of involvement and a copy of the research proposal.
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Volunteer Position with a National Nursing Organization	Participation in a national nursing organization (e.g., board or committee member)	1 term = 5 CH 1 test development workshop = 5 CH 20 CH max	PD	Proof of position (appointment letter, participation letter, thank you letter).
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MSNCB Test Development and Task Forces	Members of any MSNCB Test Development, Item Writer, or Item Reviewer Committees or MSNCB Task Forces may count their volunteer time as contact hours towards recertification.	1 session = 5 CH 20 CH max	MS	Confirmed by MSNCB Executive Office.
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MSNCB Recertification Committee	Members of the MSNCB Recertification Committee may count their volunteer time as contact hours towards recertification.	2 CH per year	MS	Confirmed by MSNCB Executive Office.
AMSN Volunteer Position		Confirmed by MSNCB Executive Office 20 CH max	MS (Legislative Committee) PD (All other AMSN Committees)	Confirmed by MSNCB Executive Office.

Additional Continuing Education Submission Guidelines

Contact hours earned at an education convention or seminar with multiple sessions may be listed as the total amount for the entire convention or seminar as long as contact hours are either all Medical-Surgical or all Professional Development. MSNCB reserves the right to request additional information on convention or seminar content or objectives.

If you earn contact hours through bundled courses, you must list each course separately in your application and appropriately designate each course as Medical-Surgical or Professional Development with corresponding credit hours.