



Neonatal Therapy Recertification Handbook 2023

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Section 1. Neonatal Therapy Certification Overview

Definition of Neonatal Therapy Certification:

Neonatal therapy certification identifies occupational and physical therapists and speech-language pathologists who have demonstrated the appropriate amount of experience, knowledge and commitment to serve high-risk infants in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU).

Definition of a Neonatal Therapist:

A neonatal therapist is an occupational therapist, physical therapist, or speech-language pathologist who delivers holistic, direct patient care and consultative services to premature and medically-complex infants in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). Neonatal therapists are an essential part of the NICU team. Using an integrated, neuroprotective, family-centered model, neonatal therapists provide highly specialized and individualized therapeutic interventions in the NICU. These interventions support optimal long-term development, prevent adverse sequelae, and nurture the infant-family dyad. Neonatal therapists also provide education to the family and NICU team. Definition from the National Association of Neonatal Therapists (NANT).

Neonatal Therapy Certification Board (NTCB) Mission Statement:

It is the mission of the NTCB to recognize and advance inter-professional neonatal therapy practice through evidence-based certification standards including validation of clinical experience and knowledge essential for effective delivery of neonatal therapy.

Neonatal Therapy Certification Board Vision Statement:

The vision of the NTCB is to build a body of certified neonatal therapists (OT, PT, SLP) who can provide safe, effective, and evidence-based services to at-risk infants and their families.

What Does Certification Mean?

Certification is designed to test the knowledge and abilities required to perform a particular job, in this case that of a neonatal therapist. When one successfully passes a certification examination, he or she can declare professional competence for a specialized area of practice. A profession is elevated if performance standards are created and a certification program is required in order to obtain employment in the specialty area. Certification in neonatal therapy identifies those therapists who have demonstrated the expertise to work independently in the NICU.

Why is Neonatal Therapy Certification Important?

Neonatal therapy is considered an advanced area of practice. With growing numbers of therapists in NICUs and the need to define competencies for a neonatal therapist working with

high-risk infants in this environment, the process of establishing neonatal therapy certification was initiated. A survey in 2013 indicated that there was a pool of at least 275 neonatal therapists in the US, the majority of whom agreed with the need for a certification process for neonatal therapists. In 2016, another survey revealed a pool of at least 482 neonatal therapists, 97% of whom indicated an interest in neonatal therapy certification. While application for certification is voluntary, the value added to the profession is essential to promote a minimum level of competency for the NICU therapist.

All Applicants Held to Same Standards:

No specific groups of individuals were or will be grandfathered into certification, based on level of experience, expertise, or otherwise. All applicants will be required to meet the same standards of portfolio submission and examination. The first certificate recipients consisted of NTCB Board members and NANT leadership in 2017. They completed the same process of application but engaged in a pilot test for the certification exam as the psychometrics were evaluated. This meant the NTCB took a 136-item test and the NANT leadership took a 134-item test (with six members taking an almost final 102-question version to assess the time allotment for the exam).

The Credentialing Body:

The credentialing body for the certification of neonatal therapists is the Neonatal Therapy Certification Board (NTCB).

Relationship of NTCB to NANT:

The Neonatal Therapy Certification Board (NTCB), formerly the Neonatal Therapy National Certification Board (NTNCB), was established by the National Association of Neonatal Therapists (NANT). However, due to criteria established by the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE), the NTNCB maintained a completely separate leadership structure from NANT and separated from NANT to become the independent, non-profit, Neonatal Therapy Certification Board (NTCB) in 2020. The NTCB applauds NANT for recognizing the importance of professional certification and appreciates its role in fostering excellence in neonatal therapy.

Basic Versus Mastery Certification:

Neonatal therapy is recognized as an advanced practice area by AOTA, APTA and ASHA as it requires specialized training and skills in balancing therapeutic interventions with medical complications and vulnerability of the developing high-risk infant. Although there is no current certification process for NICU-based therapists, several organizations have developed guidelines and defined what roles therapists should serve in the NICU. While therapy practice in the NICU implies a certain level of advanced training, and many therapists practicing in this area are master clinicians, neonatal therapy certification was developed as a basic neonatal therapy certification, based on the definition established by Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE): “A certification program is designed to test the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to perform a particular job, and, upon successfully passing a certification exam, to represent a

declaration of a particular individual's professional competence (ICE, 2013).” While additional pathways of certification may be considered in the future, the initial neonatal therapy certification is offered as a basic certification that aims to ensure basic training and knowledge needed for independent practice in the NICU.

Interdisciplinary Nature of Neonatal Therapy Certification:

The therapeutic process in the NICU includes the use of an interdisciplinary team of PT, OT and SLP. All disciplines have a unique contribution to improving outcomes of the high-risk infants in the NICU, while sharing some common knowledge that enables their participation as part of the team in the NICU setting.

Section 2. Recertification For Certified Neonatal Therapists

Timing of Recertification:

- Recertification is required every 5 years
 - If your certification expires on June 30, your recertification application will be due between January 1 and March 31 of that year.
 - If your certification expires on December 31st, your recertification application will be due between July 1 and September 30 of that year.
 - Those who do not submit the recertification application by the deadline (March 31st for those who expire on June 30th, or September 30th for those who expire on December 31st) can continue to apply through June 30th or December 31st (with a \$75 late fee added to the \$350 recertification fee).
 - If an applicant does not file a recertification application by their certification expiration date, they will no longer be certified. There is no grace period past the certification expiration date. At this point, the applicant should start the certification process, including taking the exam over again.

Method of Submission for Recertification Documents:

- Applicant portal www.neonataltherapycertification.com
- Log in with the same email that you used when you originally were certified under
 - Do not open a new account, as the system will then recognize you as a new applicant and not as a CNT who needs to recertify
 - If you have not logged into the system recently, you may need to reset your password
 - If you no longer have access to the email you became a CNT under, email info@ntncb.com to inform us of your new email so we can link your old account
 - Click the tab for ‘Neonatal Therapy Recertification’ to begin the application. As you complete the application, the system will save your information so you are free to return at another time to complete things.

Pathways to Recertification:

There are 2 different pathways to getting recertified as a neonatal therapist

- 1.) **Pathway 1:** Provide proof of 2000 hours of NICU practice and 60 hours of NICU professional education
OR...
- 2.) **Pathway 2:** Retake the certification exam and achieve a passing score

*Both options require that you provide a copy of a current license, registration or credential to practice, a photo of yourself, and a current CV

** Please note that option number 1 does not require taking the certification exam again

***The applicant's pathway choice is fixed to either Pathway 1 or Pathway 2 based on the applicant's selection when completing their recertification application.

**** The application process should take approximately 20 minutes if all documentation is ready.

NICU Specific Practice Requirements (for Pathway 1):

Must complete a minimum of 2000 hours over the 5 year certification period

May include any of the following:

- Direct patient care in the NICU
- Teaching or clinical instruction
- Mentoring other neonatal therapists
- Professional presentations (i.e. presentations to NICU staff or at conferences)
- Research, quality improvement, and/or publication
- NICU program development
- Leadership/boards/advisory teams related to the NICU
- NICU related product development, training, or testing

*Note that while direct practice can be used toward the 2000 practice requirement, it is not required, and there are other hours that can be counted toward to this requirement

NICU Specific Professional Education Requirements (for Pathway 1):

Must complete a minimum of 60 hours of professional education related to NICU clinical practice over the 5 year certification period. Continuing education hours can be counted starting after your expiration date on your current CNT certificate. Your CNT certificate can be found on your NTCB Applicant Portal. Please refer to www.neonataltherapycertification.com under the 'resources' tab for examples of courses/webinars that are NICU-related and can be counted toward this requirement.

CV Requirements (for Pathway 1 and 2):

Updated to date of application

Delineate number of hours/specific patient care time dedicated to the NICU over past 5 years

List activities performed in the NICU over past 5 years

List all other certifications held during last 5 years

Examination Requirements (for Pathway 2):

Examination is NOT required unless you are pursuing pathway 2 of recertification and opting to take the exam in lieu of presenting proof of NICU experience and education.

The Auditing Process (Pathway 1):

The NTCB randomly audits 10% of our applications both for recertification and initial certification. Audits only apply to people using recertification via practice hours and education (Pathway 1). You will be notified if you are selected for an audit via email. If you are selected for an audit, your supervisor will be contacted by a member of the NTCB team to verify your practice hours and we will ask that you upload your continuing education certificates that you have listed. You will have 7 days to upload your certificates. Additionally, if we are unable to reach your supervisor with the contact information you provided in your application, we may reach out to you for assistance with this.

Checklist of Requirements for Recertification Pathway 1:

- Email address you used for original certification
- Email address where you may receive email 5 years from now
- Current Name, address, phone number
- Full face view photo taken within the past year
- Completed recertification application
- Updated CV (listing all NICU-related activities over past 5 years)
- Certificates for NICU courses you have taken (do not need to upload unless audited)
- Current licensure/professional credential info
 - license or registration number
 - state
 - phone number of licensing board
 - email of licensing board
 - web address of licensure board or other organization with online public registry for currently credentialed therapists
 - information about other licenses held in other states

- o any additional circumstances related to credentialing.
- o Evidence of NICU Experience (2000 hours)
 - o Start and End Dates of your NICU-related experience (see list above for eligible types of experiences)
 - o Organization's name and type of organization
 - o Supervisor's phone number/email
- o Evidence of NICU Professional Education (60 hours)
 - o Conference/Webinar Title
 - o Date
 - o Course Instructor
 - o Website of course offering if available
- o \$350 recertification fee

Checklist of Requirements for Recertification Pathway 2:

- o Email address you used for original certification
- o Email address where you may receive email 5 years from now
- o Current Name, address, phone number
- o Full face view photo taken within the past year
- o Completed recertification application
- o Updated CV (listing all NICU-related activities over past 5 years)
- o Current licensure/professional credential info (l
 - o license or registration number
 - o state
 - o phone number of licensing board
 - o email of licensing board
 - o web address of licensure board or other organization with online public registry for currently credentialed therapists
 - o information about other licenses held in other states
 - o any additional circumstances related to credentialing.
- o \$350 recertification fee
- o Once you submit your recertification fee you will receive information on how to schedule the exam in your location and will have up to 3 months to sit for the exam.
- o Passing score at or above 80% (72/90) on certification exam

STEPS to Recertification Application Process:

You can access the recertification application by signing in using the same email you used when you originally applied for certification. Click the 'recertification application'.

Step 1:

- Email address
- Other email address (where you may receive email 5 years from now)
- Name

- Former/other names
- Address
- Country
- Phone number
- *Upload a picture (full face view photo taken within the past year)
- *Upload Curriculum Vitae (updated to date of application with specific time dedicated to the NICU and activities performed in the NICU delineated and all other certifications held noted)

Step 2:

- Current license number (or registration number)
- State licensed in (or location of registration or location where the applicant works if graduation from an approved school is the credential required to practice)
- Phone number of licensure board (or other organization that can verify credentialing)
- Email of licensure board (or other organization that can be reached to verify credentialing)
- Web address of the licensure board or other organization if they have an online public registry with a search function for currently credentialed therapists
- Information about other licenses held in other states
- Any additional circumstances that relate to credentialing if not already captured in other questions

Step 3:

- *Upload copy of current license (registration or credential)

Step 4:

- Indicate if you are applying for recertification by taking the exam or providing evidence of your experience and education over the past 5 years

Step 5:

- If you are submitting evidence of your experience and education (not retaking the exam), identify the start and end dates of your NICU related experience and details about the organization, including type of organization, supervisor, and phone number/email

Step 6:

- If you are submitting evidence of your experience and education (not retaking the exam), identify 60 hours of courses/conferences/webinars you have engaged in including, title, dates, course instructor, and website of course offering if available

Step 7:

- Sign the legal statement and attestation
- Sign with a digital signature

Step 8:

- Pay the \$350 recertification fee

(Optional) complete other metrics to help us track those who recertify (whether currently working in the NICU, what level, how many beds, discipline, how many years as a therapist, how many years practiced in NICU)

Review of the Recertification Application:

- You may continue to use the CNT credentials while under review.
- Those who opt for Pathway 2 must achieve a passing score of 80% on the exam to be recertified.
- If an exam failure occurs with recertification, the applicant can retake the exam within 3 months with fees commensurate with the current application fee, without losing CNT status during this grace period. If there is a second failure, the applicant is no longer certified and must start the application process over.
- Those who do not submit the recertification application by the deadline (March 31st for those who expire on June 30th, or September 30th for those who expire on December 31st) can continue to apply through June 30th or December 31st (with a \$75 late fee added to the \$350 recertification fee).
- Once a recertification application is completed the applicant will receive an email notifying them that their application has been submitted. If the applicant has not submitted all required pieces of information, the applicant will receive email notification regarding the missing information. Failure to respond and provide the necessary documentation will result in inactive status.
- Review of the recertification application may take up to three months.
- Once recertification application has been approved, an updated certificate will be available in the applicant portal.
- The new expiration date for recertification will be updated in the CNT registry on the NTCB website. The CNT number will not change as this reflects the date of original certification. Applicants may opt out of the public CNT registry by contacting the NTCB at info@ntncb.com.

