Administrative Actions & Review

Certification Process for Anesthesiologist Assistants

National Commission for Certification of Anesthesiologist Assistants, Inc.
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NCCAA OVERVIEW

The National Commission for Certification of Anesthesiologist Assistants (NCCAA) is a not-for-profit corporation organized under the laws of the state of Georgia. NCCAA certification provides assurances to the public that Certified Anesthesiologist Assistants (CAAs) possess the knowledge, skills, and competency to practice as CAAs.

While individual states provide the legal credential for the practice of anesthesiologist assistants, private voluntary certification with the NCCAA indicates compliance with the professional standards for practice as an anesthesiologist assistant. The certification credential for anesthesiologist assistants has been adopted by many health care facilities, practice groups, and health systems as a requirement for practice. The certification credential for anesthesiologist assistants has also been recognized in state medical practice acts as well as state administrative rules and regulations.

NCCAA Mission

The mission of the NCCAA is to promote patient safety through certification programs which assess the knowledge, skills, and competency of the anesthesiologist assistant and to instill lifelong learning through continuing education requirements.

History

In 1989, a group of five anesthesiologists, two anesthesiologist assistants, and one member of the public formed the National Commission for Certification of Anesthesiologist Assistants (NCCAA). Anesthesiologist assistants had been in practice for a couple of decades. The need for independent credentialing of anesthesiologist assistants was deemed important to:

- Assure the public of the training, knowledge, and skill of anesthesiologist assistants.
- Protect the anesthesiologist assistants in practice by developing and ensuring standards for practice as an anesthesiologist assistant.

Purpose

The purpose of the NCCAA is to ensure that CAAs have the necessary knowledge and skills to practice safely and effectively. In so doing, the NCCAA also protects the value of the CAA credential. The NCCAA is responsible for:

- Establishing and maintaining criteria for the earning of designation as a Certified Anesthesiologist Assistant, including requirements for initial certification and continued certification.
- Adopting and confirming compliance of initial and continued certification eligibility requirements for certified anesthesiologist assistants.
- Formulating, adopting, and confirming compliance of the requirements for eligibility for admission to NCCAA-administered examinations or assessments including, but not limited to, the NCCAA Certification Exam (CERT) and the NCCAA Continued Demonstration of Qualifications (CDQ) Exam.
- Developing, administering, scoring, and analyzing the NCCAA examination in order to establish proficient applicants for the credential of Certified Anesthesiologist Assistant.
- Formulating, adopting, and administering NCCAA-created examinations or assessments to candidates who have met all requirements for examination or assessment and have been found eligible.

No national organization can expect to determine the specific procedures that any individual CAA is qualified to perform. Nor can any national organization adequately determine whether an individual CAA may have developed an impairment that could interfere with the proper administration of anesthesia. Ultimately, these judgments must be entrusted to the individual CAA, to those with whom they work, and to those that provide state licensing for CAAs. The NCCAA seeks to protect the public's interest by enacting a plan of certification and recertification on evidence of continued competence in providing anesthesia as indicated by participation in continuing medical education, substantiation of satisfactory performance, and undergoing periodic re-examination to confirm maintenance of current medical knowledge.

Structure

The NCCAA Board of Directors is composed of certified anesthesiologist assistants who hold the NCCAA-issued credential of CAA, board certified physician anesthesiologists, and representatives of the public.

Communications

Five mechanisms are available for communicating with the National Commission:

- **Website:** www.nccaa.org
- **Email:** contact@nccaa.org
- **US Postal Service:** NCCAA, 8459 US HWY 42, Box #160, Florence, KY 41042
- **Phone:** 859-903-0089
- **Direct Message** through the NCCAA Mobile Application

Change of Address

The NCCAA maintains on file the mailing address of each applicant, candidate, and practitioner as they submit it via the practitioner portal of the NCCAA application. **It is the responsibility of the applicant, candidate, or practitioner to maintain accurate contact information, including address, email, and telephone number, with the NCCAA by use of the practitioner portal available on the NCCAA application.**

The NCCAA will not make changes of address based on letterheads, return addresses on envelopes, plain text email requests, etc. The NCCAA will not be responsible for lost or missed communications due to failure by the applicant, candidate, or practitioner to update the NCCAA of a change of address or contact information.

Change of Name

The NCCAA maintains on file the name of each applicant, candidate, and practitioner as they submit it via the practitioner portal of the NCCAA application. The name on file is used for communications, verification of certification, entrance to the testing center, and other documents. **It is the responsibility of the applicant, candidate, or practitioner to maintain accurate name information with the NCCAA by use of the practitioner portal available on the NCCAA application.**

To request a name change, the applicant, candidate, or CAA must select the name change link at the top of the Profile page in their NCCAA account and upload documentation of the name change (marriage certificate, state-issued ID or passport, divorce decree, or court order). Uploads are transmitted securely, and documents are deleted once the name change has been approved. The applicant,

candidate, or CAA will receive email notification of the name change within five (5) business days. Once approved, the updated name will appear on the certificate of certification.

The NCCAA will not make changes of names based on letterheads, return addresses on envelopes, plain text email requests, et cetera. **The NCCAA will not be responsible for lost or missed communications due to failure by the applicant, candidate, or practitioner to update the NCCAA of a change of name or contact information.**

Notification

Communication from the NCCAA via telephone, email, or US Postal Service shall be considered valid notification. The NCCAA will not be responsible for loss of communications by the US Postal Service, email, or electronic communication via the NCCAA application.

ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

Purpose and Scope

This handbook describes the administrative actions the NCCAA takes when an applicant, candidate, or Certified Anesthesiologist Assistant (CAA) does not meet a standing requirement for certification or continued certification, and the written Administrative Review available to confirm that NCCAA staff applied those requirements correctly.

Administrative actions are the result of objective, published requirements: deadlines, fees, continuing medical education (CME) registration and audit, examination requirements, and eligibility criteria. These requirements are established by the NCCAA Board of Directors and are applied uniformly by NCCAA staff under standing NCCAA policy. An administrative action reflects that a requirement was not met. It is not a finding of misconduct.

Administrative Actions Are Not Disciplinary Actions

Administrative actions are separate and distinct from disciplinary actions. Disciplinary actions, including automatic and discretionary revocation of certification, address conduct and are governed exclusively by the *NCCAA Disciplinary Action & Appeals Handbook*.

Because administrative actions involve the application of standing policy rather than judgments about conduct:

- Administrative actions are not disciplinary sanctions.
- Administrative actions are not subject to an Executive Committee hearing or to appeal to the NCCAA Board of Directors.
- The only review available for an administrative action is the written Administrative Review described in this handbook.

Matters Not Covered by This Handbook

This handbook does not apply to:

- Any matter involving automatic or discretionary revocation of certification, or any other disciplinary sanction. These matters are governed by the *NCCAA Disciplinary Action & Appeals Handbook*.
- Requests for an exception, extension, or waiver of a certification requirement. Exceptions must be requested and granted in advance, as described in the applicable NCCAA Certification Handbook.
- Challenges to examination content and requests for score verification, are addressed in the applicable examination handbook.

Related Handbooks and Policies

This handbook should be read together with the NCCAA certification and examination handbooks, the NCCAA Fee Schedule located on the NCCAA website at www.nccaa.org, and the *NCCAA Disciplinary Action & Appeals Handbook*. Where this handbook refers to a requirement, deadline, or fee, the governing document for that requirement controls.

DEFINITIONS

For purposes of this handbook:

Administrative Action means an action taken by NCCAA staff, under standing NCCAA policy, because an applicant, candidate, or CAA did not satisfy an objective requirement for certification, continued certification, or examination eligibility.

Administrative Review means the written review described in this handbook, limited to determining whether NCCAA staff correctly applied the applicable requirement.

Administrative Reviewer means the Executive Committee of the NCCAA Board, acting in its review capacity and reviewing the written record only.

Business Day means Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. Unless otherwise stated, every reference to "days" in this handbook means business days.

Notice means written notice delivered by any method described under *Notification* in this handbook.

Requester means the applicant, candidate, or CAA who submits a request for Administrative Review.

GROUNDS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

Any of the following will result in administrative action:

- Failure to pay fees or other monetary obligations to the NCCAA by the due date.
- Failure to meet the eligibility requirements for certification or continued certification.
- Failure to comply with the requirements for continued certification, including registration of required CME, compliance with any CME audit, and successful completion of the Continued Demonstration of Qualifications (CDQ) Exam within the applicable eligibility period, unless a documented exception has been granted in advance by the NCCAA.
- Exhaustion of the number of attempts allowed to successfully pass the NCCAA Certification Exam or the CDQ Exam, as outlined in the respective handbooks.

Conduct associated with any of the requirements above (for example, providing false information on a CME registration or in response to an audit) is not an administrative matter. Such conduct is addressed under the *NCCAA Disciplinary Action & Appeals Handbook*.

TYPES OF ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

Depending on the requirement that was not met, an administrative action may include one or more of the following.

Denial of Application or Eligibility

The NCCAA will deny an application for certification, continued certification, or examination when the applicant has not satisfied the applicable eligibility requirements or has not paid the required fees.

Loss of Certification

When a CAA does not satisfy a requirement for continued certification by the applicable deadline, the CAA's NCCAA certification will no longer be current. An individual whose certification is not current may not represent themselves as certified by the NCCAA and may not use the NCCAA-issued CAA credential. The NCCAA's verification of certification will reflect the individual's current certification status.

Examination Ineligibility

A candidate who has exhausted the number of attempts allowed for an NCCAA examination will be ineligible to register for that examination except as provided in the applicable examination handbook.

Reporting of Administrative Actions

Administrative actions are not disciplinary sanctions and are not reported by the NCCAA as disciplinary actions. Changes in certification status resulting from an administrative action are public and will be reflected in the NCCAA's public verification of certification.

NOTICE OF ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION

NCCAA staff will notify the affected individual of an administrative action in writing. The notice will state:

- The requirement that was not met and the governing NCCAA policy or handbook provision.
- The facts on which NCCAA staff relied.
- The administrative action taken and its effective date.
- The right to request Administrative Review, and the deadline and requirements for doing so.

Administrative actions take effect on the date stated in the notice. Because administrative actions apply standing policy, they do not require action by the Executive Committee or the NCCAA Board of Directors.

It is the responsibility of each applicant, candidate, and CAA to maintain current and accurate contact information with the NCCAA. A claim that an individual did not receive notice will not excuse the individual from an administrative action, so long as the NCCAA sent notice to at least one of the contact methods provided by the individual.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

Nature of the Review

Administrative Review is a written review of the record conducted by the Executive Committee acting in its review capacity. It is not the Executive Committee review and hearing described in the *NCCAA Disciplinary Action & Appeals Handbook*. There is no hearing, and the Requester and any representative of the Requester will not appear before the Administrative Reviewer. A Requester may consult or be assisted by counsel in preparing a written request, at the Requester's own expense.

Scope of the Review

Administrative Review is limited to the following questions:

1. Did NCCAA staff identify and apply the correct requirement, policy, or handbook provision?
2. Were the facts on which NCCAA staff relied accurate? Examples include whether a payment, CME registration, or audit response was in fact received by the deadline, or whether NCCAA records contain an error.
3. Did NCCAA staff honor any exception that was documented and granted by the NCCAA in advance?

Matters Outside the Scope of Review

The following will not be considered in an Administrative Review and are not grounds for reversing an administrative action:

- Requests to waive, extend, or change a requirement or deadline.
- Personal, professional, or financial hardship, including employment consequences of the administrative action.
- Disagreement with the requirement or policy itself. Comments on NCCAA policy may be submitted to the NCCAA at any time for consideration by the Board.

- A request for an exception that was not made and granted before the applicable deadline.
- Non-receipt of notices or reminders, where the NCCAA sent communications to the contact information on file.

How to Request Administrative Review

A request for Administrative Review must be received by the NCCAA within thirty (30) business days after the date of the notice of administrative action. The request must:

- The request may be submitted as a signed letter attached to an email sent to contact@nccaa.org; statements written in the body of an email will not be considered. Identify the administrative action and the notice being reviewed.
- State which of the questions listed under *Scope of the Review* the Requester believes was answered incorrectly, and why.
- Include all documentation the Requester believes supports the request (for example, payment receipts, CME certificates, or submission confirmations).
- Be accompanied by payment of the Administrative Review fee of $275, as established by the NCCAA Board of Directors and listed in the NCCAA Fee Schedule.

Incomplete or Untimely Requests

A request that is not received within the required timeframe, or that does not include the required elements, will not be considered. NCCAA staff will notify the Requester that the request was not accepted and the reason. The administrative action will remain in effect.

Step 1: Staff Correction

Upon receipt of a complete and timely request, NCCAA staff will first review the request against NCCAA records. If staff determine that an error was made, they will correct the error, rescind or modify the administrative action, and notify the Requester in writing. The matter will then be closed.

Step 2: Review by the Executive Committee

If NCCAA staff find no error in the request under Step 1, the request, along with supporting documentation submitted by the Requester, and any relevant NCCAA records will be forwarded to the Administrative Reviewer. These documents constitute the record of the Administrative Review. The Administrative Reviewer

may request additional information from the Requester or from NCCAA staff, which will become part of the record.

No member of the Executive Committee who has a conflict of interest, or the appearance of a conflict of interest, with respect to the Requester, or who participated in the original administrative determination, shall participate in the Administrative Review. Recusal shall be determined in the same manner described for conflicts of interest in the *NCCAA Disciplinary Action & Appeals Handbook*.

If recusals leave fewer Executive Committee members than the quorum required by the NCCAA Bylaws, the Chair of the Board shall appoint a substitute officer or Board member, who has no conflict of interest and did not participate in the original determination, to serve on the Administrative Review. If the Chair of the Board is recused, the Vice-Chair shall make the appointment.

Decision

The Administrative Reviewer will issue a written decision that will:

- **Affirm** the administrative action, if NCCAA staff correctly applied the requirement; or
- **Reverse or modify** the administrative action, if NCCAA staff applied the wrong requirement, relied on inaccurate facts, or failed to honor a previously granted exception.

In either case, if the record suggests conduct that may warrant disciplinary action (for example, falsified documentation), the Administrative Reviewer will also refer the matter for consideration under the *NCCAA Disciplinary Action & Appeals Handbook*.

The NCCAA will make reasonable efforts to notify the Requester of the decision within sixty (60) business days after receipt of a complete request. The decision will be delivered by any method described under *Notification*.

Status During Review

A request for Administrative Review does not stay or delay the administrative action. The action remains in effect while the review is pending.

Effect of a Reversal

If an administrative action is reversed, the NCCAA will restore the individual's status as it would have been had the action not been taken and will update its verification

of certification accordingly. The $275 Administrative Review fee will be refunded in full. The fee is not refunded if the administrative action is affirmed, or if the request is not accepted because it was incomplete or untimely.

Finality

A decision by NCCAA staff under Step 1 to rescind or modify an administrative action, or a decision of the Administrative Reviewer under Step 2, is the final decision of the NCCAA on the administrative action. There is no further review, no hearing before the Executive Committee or any other body, and no appeal to the NCCAA Board of Directors.

Requests Submitted Under the Wrong Process

A request for an Executive Committee hearing, reconsideration, or appeal that concerns an administrative action will be treated as a request for Administrative Review under this handbook and is subject to the same deadline and requirements.

RETURNING TO CERTIFIED STATUS

An individual whose certification is no longer current, or whose application or examination eligibility was denied, because of an administrative action may return to certified or eligible status only by satisfying the re-entry or reinstatement requirements, as listed in the applicable NCCAA certification or examination handbook, including payment of any applicable fee. Administrative Review is not a substitute for those requirements.

RECORDS

A record of each administrative action and each Administrative Review, including the decision, will be maintained in the individual's NCCAA file in accordance with the NCCAA record retention policy.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW AT A GLANCE

Step	Who acts	Timeframe
Notice of Administrative Action	NCCAA staff	Action is effective on the date stated in the notice
Request for Administrative Review	Requester, in writing, with $275 fee	Received within 30 business days after the notice
Step 1: Staff Correction	NCCAA staff	Upon receipt of a complete request
Step 2: Written Review	Executive Committee, acting in its review capacity	Reasonable efforts to decide within 60 business days
Decision	Final; no hearing or further appeal	—