Disclaimer

AADNS certifications and educational courses were developed to serve as programs and references for long-term care. To the best of our knowledge, they reflect current federal regulations and practices. However, they cannot be considered absolute and universal. The information in these courses must be considered in light of the individual organization and state regulations.

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This handbook reflects the policies and procedures as of January 2019. All policies and procedures are subject to change. If you have any questions or require further information, visit www.AADNS-LTC.org or contact AADNS staff toll-free at (844) 796-9634.

Statement of nondiscrimination

The opportunity to earn the AADNS credentials is available to all candidates who meet the minimum criteria. AADNS does not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, religion, national origin, marital status, sexual preference, or disability.

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Customer Service: toll-free (844) 796-9634 Fax: (303) 758-3588
www.AADNS-LTC.org

Accreditation

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# Director of Nursing Services—Certified (DNS-CT) Candidate Handbook

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Welcome

Congratulations on taking the first step toward earning the Director of Nursing Services--Certified (DNS-CT) credential. The American Association of Directors of Nursing Services (AADNS) established the DNS-CT certification educational courses, exams and workshops, to promote the highest standards for directors of nursing services in the long-term care profession. Reviewing this handbook is the first step toward joining long-term care professionals who have distinguished themselves with the certification credential.

About AADNS

AADNS is a nonprofit membership organization dedicated to supporting long-term care professionals who provide quality care for nursing facility residents across the nation. AADNS is the sister organization of the American Association of Nurse Assessment Coordination (AANAC). Committed to the success of the entire interdisciplinary team, AADNS delivers accurate and timely information, educational opportunities, advocacy in legislation, and a peer community of support.

Whether you’re looking to earn one of our respected certifications or just want to brush up your knowledge by taking a course or two, AADNS keeps you up to date and makes the complexities of long-term care easy to understand.

How to use this Candidate Handbook

This handbook is intended to help you understand the policies and procedures for DNS-CT certification and the steps required to earn and maintain your credential. This handbook is also intended to help you learn about the DNS-CT courses.

Once you decide to pursue the DNS-CT credential, this Candidate Handbook will be a useful reference for you to:

- Review the DNS-CT Body of Knowledge
- Assess your knowledge and professional experience of the content
- Identify gaps in knowledge and develop a personal course of study
- Register for courses
- Study, prepare, and take the DNS-CT certification examination
- Maintain your credential through recertification

AADNS’s educational materials are reviewed and updated by a team of experts to ensure you receive the most up-to-date information related to this complex body of knowledge. No document can address the full list of potential questions, policy details, or future program changes. You are encouraged to use this handbook as a supplement to the information listed on the AADNS-LTC website as well as information provided by AADNS staff, whom you can contact toll-free at (844) 796-9634.
Overview

What is the purpose of DNS-CT certification educational courses?

The DNS-CT designation and educational courses are setting the national standard in certification and education for directors of nursing services. AADNS serves the public interest by developing, administering, and reviewing a certification process that reflects current DNS competencies. The goal of DNS-CT certification is to establish that professionals have the knowledge and skills necessary to demonstrate competence in this area. The courses support achievement of the certification credential.

What are the benefits of certification and education?

Upon completion of your personal course of study and after passing the certification exam with a score of 80% or better, you will be allowed to use the initials DNS-CT to designate your status. This designation indicates you have met a nationally recognized standard of expertise for directors of nursing services for long-term care. AADNS has registered to own the mark DNS-CT.

Both individuals and employers can benefit from an individual’s receiving DNS-CT certification:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual professional benefits can include:</th>
<th>Organizational benefits can include:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Verification by an independent organization of your mastery of the knowledge required to perform your job</td>
<td>• Improved quality of care and quality of life for residents</td>
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<td>• Professional growth and development</td>
<td>• Decreased employee turnover</td>
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<td>• Enhanced job opportunities</td>
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What are the certification requirements?

- Hold a current RN license.
- Have the equivalent of two years of full-time long-term or post-acute care experience, with a minimum of one year of experience as either a DNS or relevant nursing leadership experience.
- Pass the DNS-CT certification exams with a score of 80% or better. A live three-day workshop is available for preparation.

How do I register for certification and education?

To purchase the DNS-CT courses and exams in the format most beneficial to you, visit the AADNS website.

How much does education cost?

The DNS-CT program consists of 10 courses, offered in several formats to support various learning styles. Pricing is based on cost per course. A three-day live workshop is also available. AADNS members receive substantial discounts.
Getting Ready for the Exam

DNS-CT Body of Knowledge and educational courses

AADNS undertook a rigorous process with numerous experts in the profession to determine the domains and tasks within the DNS-CT Body of Knowledge, in terms of both criticality and importance. The domain emphasis reflects the percentage of questions that come from each domain.

The individual courses are listed below according to their affiliated domains. Candidates who complete all 10 courses earn 40.5 hours of continuing education credit. Candidates who attend the three-day workshop earn 22.5 hours of education credit.

- **Domain 1: Principles of Leadership** (Domain Emphasis: 16%) – Building the foundation for quality care throughout the nursing department requires effective integration of leadership and management concepts. Managing and developing staff, developing teams, promoting organizational values, and creating evidence-based systems of care are essential to leading nursing services.
  - Tasks
    - Differentiate between leadership and management
    - Promote organizational vision, mission, and values
    - Understand the types of leadership styles and how they impact team function
    - Apply principles of leadership as a role model
    - Develop and foster activities and functions of the nursing management team
    - Lead the nursing department in interprofessional/interdisciplinary team coordination
  - Study courses associated with this domain
    - Leadership & Management for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 4.0 hours)
    - Essential Business Skills for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 4.0 hours)

- **Domain 2: Individual Skills for Management and Supervision** (Domain Emphasis: 13%) – Leading the long-term care workforce is a dynamic and multi-faceted activity that entails hiring, staffing, scheduling, orientation, training and development, and ongoing performance management. Providing a safe work environment and abiding by employment laws are necessary for the retention of an effective and caring work force.
  - Tasks
    - Understand the role of the manager in the nursing department
    - Ensure team compliance with laws governing the organization, residents, employees, and the environment
    - Employ effective interpersonal skills for management
    - Understand and implement effective human resource management
  - Study courses associated with this domain
    - Leadership & Management for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 4.0 hours)
    - Human Resource Management for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 4.0 hours)

- **Domain 3: Organizational Oversight and Management** (Domain Emphasis: 10%) – Specialized evidence-based nursing knowledge drives oversight of the nursing department in specific resident care areas such as assessment, care planning, clinical and managerial practices, and transitions of care. Incorporating a quality assessment and performance improvement philosophy in all nursing systems ensures that care management and surveillance is coordinated, evaluated, and tracked.
Tasks

- Apply principles of systems thinking for quality in the nursing department
- Understand and implement principles of staff competencies
- Describe principles and processes for clinical surveillance of nursing systems
- Utilize nursing knowledge for oversight of the nursing department in specific resident care areas

Study course associated with this domain

- Care Management and Surveillance Systems for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 4.0 hours)

Domain 4: Business Acumen for the DNS (Domain Emphasis: 16%) – Nurse Leaders adept at leading within their organizations have a working knowledge about key business and operational processes including strategic planning, fiscal management, informatics, marketing and public relations, and emergency planning. Needed is a keen awareness about the current healthcare environment and its impact on post-acute care to help move the organization forward.

Tasks

- Understand the DNS’s role in horizontal and vertical organizational hierarchies
- Implement effective strategic planning processes
- Understand principles of fiscal management
- Describe the current healthcare environment impacting post-acute care
- Apply principles of informatics and technology in management to long-term care
- Identify the role of the DNS in marketing and public relations for the nursing department
- Understand the principles of person-centered care and customer service
- Detail the components of contingency planning for emergency management
- Provide oversight of the RAI/MDS process

Study courses associated with this domain

- Essential Business Skills for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 4.0 hours)
- MDS and Medicare Process Essentials for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 5.0 hours)

Domain 5: Quality Improvement in the Nursing Department (Quality of Care) (Domain Emphasis: 20%) – Governance and Leadership for Skilled Nursing Facilities require data systems, monitoring systems, systematic analysis, systemic action, and systemic evaluation for improving organizational performance. Nurse leaders utilize quality measures and prioritized monitoring activities while applying the PDSA cycle to determine and establish thresholds for compliance and improvement.

Tasks

- Understand the components of Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement (QAPI)
- Describe how Quality Measures are used as outcome measures
- Understand the Five-Star Quality Rating System

Study course associated with this domain

- Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 3.75 hours)

Domain 6: Regulatory Compliance (Domain Emphasis: 19%) – Regulatory management is integral to all nursing facility clinical and operational functions. Nurse leaders must have special knowledge about multiple regulatory components, including various types of survey readiness, their management and their enforcement, the Quality Indictor Survey system, risk management, compliance, and ethics.

Tasks
- Demonstrate skills for regulatory survey readiness
- Apply principles of regulatory survey management
- Understand the Quality Indicator Survey (QIS) system
- Ensure the system for compliance and ethics is implemented in the nursing department
- Implement principles of resident rights and safety
- Demonstrate understanding of risk management

  o Study courses associated with this domain
    - Survey Readiness 24/7/365 for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 3.75 hours)
    - Survey Management and Enforcement for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 4.0 hours)
    - Compliance and Ethics Essentials for the Nurse Leader (4.0 hours)
    - Risk Management for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 4.0 hours)

- **Domain 7: Professional Development** (Domain Emphasis: 6%) – Professional nursing is guided by the Scope of Practice Standards and state specific Nurse Practice Acts. To lead effectively nurse leaders must identify mechanisms for the evaluation of professional practice, enhance characteristics of personal professionalism, implement strategies for creating a professional work environment, and demonstrate personal responsibility for sustaining and improving professional competencies. Nurse leaders must stay abreast of regulatory and practice changes, network with colleagues, and advocate for the profession to help move the nursing profession forward.

  o Tasks
    - Understand the importance of scope of practice.
    - Describe the process for the DNS to develop personal and professional competencies.
    - Engage in advocacy to enhance the profession of nursing and resident care.

  o Study course associated with this domain
    - Essential Business Skills for the Nurse Leader (Online Course CE: 4.0 hours)

**What is the format of the exam?**

A certification exam accompanies each course and is completed online and accessed through your Classroom account on the [AADNS website](https://www.aadns.org). The certification exams are an objective, multiple-choice question format. The questions are designed to test your recall of specific knowledge, as well as your ability to analyze and apply that knowledge to example situations. It is not a timed test. The questions test knowledge of the domains and tasks in the DNS-CT Body of Knowledge. The domain emphasis reflects the percentage of questions that comes from each domain. You will be asked to select the correct or best answer from four options. Only one answer is correct for every question.

**How do I prepare for the exam?**

Content for the examination is not obtained from any one particular source. The DNS-CT Body of Knowledge should be a guideline for study preparation. The educational materials from the online curriculum, as well as live workshops, provide a basis of knowledge for exam preparation. You should also utilize current journals, textbooks, government documents (see the Government Resources section at the end of this handbook), and other reference material related to the subjects listed in the Body of Knowledge as supplemental preparatory materials for the exam.

After reviewing the Body of Knowledge, you can plan your exam preparation based on your general understanding and working knowledge of the subject areas. For example, because of daily use at your current job, you may have a good understanding and working knowledge of some of the domain areas—these areas
may need only a quick review as you prepare for the test. For areas with which you are less familiar, you may decide you need more in-depth study or training before completing the certification exam; you can allocate your study time appropriately.

You should also consider what percentage of the test questions will cover each major content area; this information is listed as the domain emphasis percentage in the Body of Knowledge section of this handbook. By focusing your studies, you can spend extra time as needed to thoroughly understand the most significant sources of content area on the exam. Sample exam questions and answers are listed in the Resources section of this handbook as an additional study aid.

**How are reasonable accommodations made?**

If you require reasonable accommodations to complete the certification exams for the program, please contact AADNS toll-free at (844) 796-9634, or by email at education@AADNS-LTC.org.

**Taking the Exam**

**What are the requirements during the exam?**

AADNS assigns you a user name and password as a key control in monitoring and verifying user identity in the Classroom area of the AADNS website. This log-in information helps ensure that each user’s information is available only to the authorized user. As a user of the Classroom, it is important that you do not share this user name and password with anyone. You should be the only one to access and complete your exam and course material in your Classroom account.

Once you begin each certification exam, you may complete it either in one sitting or in sections. It is an open-book format, so you may use reference materials when you take the exam. However, you cannot seek assistance from other individuals while completing the exam. The exams are offered on an honor-system basis that assumes you will act in good faith to ensure your performance is an accurate representation of your own personal knowledge and skills related to the subject matter.

AADNS does not tolerate cheating or any breach of academic or professional ethics that may compromise the security or integrity of its certification exams. All incidents of reported cheating will be investigated. Discussing content found on the certification exams is strictly prohibited; any such posts on Community discussion boards will be removed. Anyone found compromising the security of the exams by attempting to copy, record, or distribute questions in any manner will be permanently excluded from the certification process.

**How long do I have to complete a course/exam?**

- **Online course(s) and Certification examinations** – The certification courses and exams are completed through your Classroom account. These are not timed, but expire 90 days after launching. A course is considered launched once it is opened for the first time. If you purchase a course but do not launch it, it will not expire. Once you open an exam, you may exit the exam and return at a later time to complete it.

- **Exam attempts** – Each course provides two attempts to pass the certification exam with a score of 80% or better. The exam itself is not timed, and you do not have to complete it in one sitting. If you do not pass after two attempts, you will be required to purchase the course again to gain two more exam
attempts. If you do not pass after four attempts, you must wait one year before taking the certification exam again. In the case of an extenuating circumstance, you can submit a formal, written appeal to request an exception to the policy. To find out how to submit an appeal, contact the AADNS Education Department at education@AADNS.org.

- **Workshop** – If you attended a live workshop, the exams will be added to your account and must be completed electronically.
- **Printed manual(s)** – If you purchased a printed manual(s), the exams will be added to your account and must be completed electronically.

### After the Test

**How is my information kept confidential?**

Information about candidates and their examination results is confidential. AADNS carefully protects your data from loss, misuse, unauthorized access or disclosure, alteration, or destruction. Within the company, data is stored in password-controlled servers with limited access. Your personal information is never shared outside the company without your permission, unless required by law to comply with a current judicial proceeding, court order, or legal process. If AADNS is required by law to release your confidential information, you will be notified by email, unless prohibited by law.

**How is the exam scored?**

The DNS-CT certification exams, as well as educational courses and workshops, set a standard for basic levels of knowledge that can reasonably be expected of long-term care professionals. Your performance on each certification exam will be measured against this predetermined standard to assess your competency in these subject matters. Your performance will not be measured against other candidates taking the certification exam; your individual performance will determine whether you meet the knowledge standards required to pass.

**What information will I receive about my score?**

Once you have completed the examination, you will be presented with the percentage of questions correctly answered. Based on the percentage, your exam results will indicate “pass” or “fail.” You must achieve a score of 80% or better to pass the exam.

You will not see the correct answers to missed questions on the exam results. To protect the confidentiality of the exam content, and to maintain the value and integrity of the certification, AADNS does provide domain level feedback. The certification exam is intended to measure proficiency in the subject and to determine whether an individual has the knowledge necessary for certification.

**When will I receive my score?**

The certification exams are self-scoring and provide immediate feedback. Upon completion of the exam, your computer screen will display the percentage of correctly answered questions and indicate “pass” or “fail.” You may access this information at a later date by logging into your Classroom account and clicking on My Transcript.
Once you pass 10 certification exams, you may begin using the initials DNS-CT to designate your status as a certified director of nursing services. Credentials are awarded for a two-year period.

**Can I retake the exam if I don’t pass?**

You have two attempts to pass the certification exam with a score of 80% or better. If you do not pass after two attempts, you will be required to purchase the course again to gain two more exam attempts. If you do not pass after four attempts, you must wait one year before taking the certification exam again.

In the case of an extenuating circumstance, you may submit a formal, written appeal to AADNS to request an exception to the policy. To find out how to submit an appeal, contact the AADNS Education Department at education@AADNS-LTC.org.

**About the appeals provision**

AADNS works diligently to provide top-quality course materials and exams using a standardized process of question development and validation. AADNS also affords candidates a high level of flexibility in completing the exam. Due to these policies and procedures, an appeal will be heard only in the case of an extenuating circumstance. In this case, you may submit a formal, written appeal to AADNS to request an exception to the policy. To find out how to submit an appeal, contact the AADNS Education Department at education@AADNS-LTC.org.

**Recertification: Certification Maintenance**

**When do I need to recertify?**

The DNS-CT certification is valid for two years from your certification completion date. Your credential expires at the end of the month in which you completed your exam requirements. You will have a one-month grace period beyond your certification expiration date to complete the recertification requirements. Certification renewals submitted in the grace period will be automatically subjected to the audit process, described below.

**What are the recertification requirements?**

- Hold a current RN license
- Hold a current DNS-CT certification

To maintain your DNS-CT certification, you must recertify every two years. To recertify you must take and pass one recertification course and exam. Alternatively, you can complete the 10-course DNS-CT program again. The recertification exam requires a passing score of 80% or better. Purchasing a recertification course does not extend the expiration date of your credential. The expiration date for your credential remains the same, regardless of when your course materials expire.

**How much does DNS-CT recertification and education cost?**

Recertification pricing can be found on the AADNS website.
What if I let my certification lapse?

If you do not complete the recertification requirements within the one-month grace period of your certification expiration date, you will no longer be entitled to use the DNS-CT credential. If you miss your grace period, you must wait one year to take the DNS-CT courses and exams again and earn a score of 80% or better.

In the case of extenuating circumstances, you can submit a formal, written appeal to AADNS to request an exception to the policy. To find out how to submit an appeal, contact the AADNS Education Department at education@AADNS-LTC.org.
Resources

Government resources

In addition to the educational courses and workshops described in the DNS-CT Body of Knowledge section, the following list of government resources may be helpful in preparing for the exams. This list does not attempt to include all acceptable or valuable references available. The exam questions are not based solely on any of these resources.

- State Operations Manual
- MDS 3.0 for Nursing Homes and Swing Bed Providers
- Quality Measures Manual v. 9.0
- Five-Star Technical User’s Guide
- QAPI