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In the midst of this challenging time with COVID-19, I want to reach out and reassure all of you that the North Carolina Board of Nursing (NCBON) is doing everything possible to ensure that nursing regulation does not present an unnecessary barrier to nursing education programs, graduate nurses entering the workforce and reinstatement or movement of nurses into North Carolina, either physically or through telehealth. We know it is critically important to get nurses in the pipeline as soon as possible.

I know many of you have heard by now that Pearson Vue (testing centers for NCLEX) temporarily closed testing centers in the U.S. and Canada. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) has worked with Pearson to arrange alternate testing for nursing graduates. On Wednesday, March 25, a limited number (60) of Pearson test sites will resume testing those candidates who have already been authorized to test. As soon as we know the location of the North Carolina site(s), we will let you know. The test centers must follow CDC guidelines, which will limit the number of test takers at any given time. Due to the scarcity of testing sites and the expected delay in testing, NCBON will re-institute the "Graduate Nurse" status for new North Carolina graduates. We will defer to Program Directors of Schools of Nursing to determine whether individual students have mastered the required competencies (didactic and clinical) for program completion.

Once the Program Director deems a student "eligible for graduation", the individual can apply to NCBON for a "graduate" temporary permit. The temporary permit will allow the graduate nurse (RN and LPN) to practice to their full scope, provided they have RN supervision. This temporary approval is for North Carolina only (a single state license) and is time limited until the graduate can take the NCLEX and complete the fingerprint background check for full licensure. This should ensure that our graduate nurses can readily enter the workforce without delay.

I am also keenly aware of the need for retired or inactive nurses to be able to re-join the workforce. As I write to you, NCBON staff are working on internal processes to make this happen. We will promulgate emergency rules within the week to codify both the process for temporary permits for reinstatement and new graduates.

NCBON is committed to our citizens, our nursing education programs, our health care systems and our graduate nurses. Our purpose is public protection for North Carolinians and we are committed to work collaboratively with you as we all move through this crisis.

Thank you for all that you do and for your extraordinary efforts at this time. Please let us know how we may be of assistance.

Sincerely,

Julia L. George, RN, MSN, FRE  
Chief Executive Officer



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