



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

What is a neonatal nurse?

A neonatal nurse works with premature and sick infants and their families. They work as part of a multi disciplinary team managing the care, assessing for problems, and undertaking procedures such as commencing IVs, monitoring vital signs, administering medications, providing comfort, educating parents in how to care for their babies, and preparing them for discharge. The focus of the neonatal nurse is the unique relationship between the baby, parents and nurse. The neonatal nurse is an advocate for the baby, as well as focusing on improving the developmental outcome of the baby they are caring for. Some neonatal nurses work in advance practice roles where they use critical decision making skills and may work in different environments such as the transport team, family support or home care.

How do I become a neonatal nurse? What advice do you have to nurture and expand on professional development, in order to work towards a career in neonatal nursing?

Response to a nursing student:

A great way to initiate a career as a neonatal nurse would be to request that your consolidation be in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (either level II or III). This will help provide opportunities across the neonatal spectrum of care and may lead to other areas of interest within Maternal Newborn continuum of care. Many Canadian province's federal governments have developed "New Graduate Initiative" programs which are a wonderful way for nursing students to gain full time work post graduation and gain more experience/apply for positions in an area that interest them.

There are many specialty courses on management of the high risk neonate and family that may be accessed through distance learning or classroom settings, which provide a much more in depth discussion of the anatomy, pharmacology and pathophysiology of neonatal diseases, developmental supportive and family centered care. Opportunities for leadership exist in the charge nurse role, neonatal transport and/or as an Advanced Practice Nurse: Nurse Practitioner or Clinical Nurse Specialist.

Response to a company/high school student looking at career options:

Students can complete their application directly to the Bachelor of Nursing Science program from high school. Requirements for admission are specific to the university and program. Generally speaking tuition fees range from \$30,000 - 35,000 for 4 years (or around \$7,000 – 7,500/year). This does not include residence or books, etc.

During the clinical component of the 4 years program, there will be different opportunities to experience many specialty areas. One of them will be the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. Should the student like this area, it would be prudent to communicate with their professor. Usually during the final year, there is a consolidation period in which the student has a placement in one of their requested specialty areas. In many provinces there are 'New Graduate Initiatives' which support many nurses to then apply to an employer to that area of specialty. For example, every spring there would be 2-3 consolidation students in the NICU and the ones who were interested in pursuing a neonatal nursing career should meet with the manager, submit a resume to the Human Resources department. The student is guaranteed ~6 months of full time employment in the NICU (program initiative dependant) and their salaries were provided by the corresponding Ministry of Health. Generally, near the end of this time they have obtained their RN license and are working independently and able to apply for positions as available in the NICU.

If successful in obtaining a permanent or temporary position in the NICU, they continue as a novice Neonatal nurse. Those who want to further develop professionally in this specialty can take on-line courses (post-graduate) in high-risk neonatology and critical care neonatal nursing. Usually these courses are offered with a practicum and vary in duration and credits. Cost of these additional courses usually run around \$500 - 700/course for which there may be existing financial bursaries/funding opportunities from various sources. If they want to transition further along the continuum of neonatal nursing: transport, roles as an educator, advanced practice nurse either as a Clinical Nurse Specialist or Nurse Practitioner are available. For these latter advanced roles they would need to have 2-3 years working in a NICU prior to enrolling in a Masters of Nursing course followed with a specialty certificate in neonatology (NP). This usually takes 2 years full time with an associated cost of \$12,000 - 15,000 (Canadian) to the individual. Some units have educational funding mechanisms for nurses wanting to pursue further education.

What are some Canadian resources for neonatal nurses?

Canadian Association of Neonatal Nurses – www.neonatalcann.ca

Canadian Pediatric Society – www.cps.ca

Canadian Association of Perinatal and Women's Health Nurses – www.capwhn.ca
(formerly AWHONN Canada)

Canadian Neonatal Network – www.canadianneonatalnetwork.org

Breastfeeding Committee for Canada (BCC) – www.breastfeedingcanada.ca

Canadian Nurse Association – www.cna-nurses.ca / www.NurseONE.ca

What are Canadian Neonatal Nurse Standards?

To date Canadian Neonatal Nurse Standards have not been developed. This year (2011) a small working group of nurses began to meet to draft and develop these standards. Please stay tuned for information on these developments and for opportunities to participate on important issues for neonatal nurses and help develop standards representative of Canadian Neonatal Nurses.

When will there be Canadian Neonatal Nurse Certification exams?

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) has a specialty certification process of which CANN/ACIIN is working closely with. There are 3 phases involved with the development of the specialty certification process. First, an organization has to develop Canadian Neonatal Nurse standards from which competencies will evolve. Secondly, CNA needs to have a sense as to the number of neonatal nurses in Canada and where they practice. Some of this work has been started, but there are still some neonatal intensive care units who have not responded to the Neonatal Nurse Census request as of yet. Finally, funding for this initiative is also required and innovative solutions are being sought.