

# Nurses Are A Critical Asset To Emergency Response, Both for Anticipated and Unforeseen Medical Conditions and Emergent Situations

Caroline Punches and Elaine Hudson from the American Red Cross, Mary Anderson, MD, MPH, Washoe County Health District Health Officer, and Debra Barone, Washoe County District Health Department, Medical Reserve Corps Program Coordinator presented information to the Nevada State Board of Nursing at its November, 2008 Board meeting about their organizations' need for licensed nurses to volunteer to be ready to serve in times of disaster or during other times of need.

Dr. Anderson suggested that in the event of a public health emergency, most licensed nurses would be required to report to their places of employment and may not be available to respond to the call for volunteers. She recommended

offering a special, no-cost license to retired or inactive nurses who are willing to volunteer their services. By working with these organizations, the Board would be supporting the expansion of the pool of nurses available for crisis response.

Board staff had previously met with those involved to discuss how to meet the needs of these organizations. An agreement was reached to create a policy that would be considered by the Board which would outline the process to implement a waiver for licensure fees for volunteer nurses if they met all other requirements for licensure in Nevada and if they attested that they would limit their practice to gratuitous nursing in times of natural or manmade disasters for an organized relief organization or in

matters of public health such as immunization centers, public health clinics, or indigent clinics.

A comprehensive policy and procedure was presented to the Board at its January, 2009 Board meeting in Las Vegas. A copy of that approved policy is part of this article. Please read the policy and if you have questions or are interested in obtaining a Volunteer RN or LPN license, please contact the Board's office. We will begin accepting Volunteer License applications on June 1, 2009.

The Nevada State Board of Nursing seeks to encourage patient safety by supporting nurses who wish to practice as a nursing volunteer by waiving the licensure fee under special conditions outlined in the Board's new policy.

**I. PURPOSE:** The Nevada State Board of Nursing seeks to encourage patient safety by supporting nurses who wish to practice as a nursing volunteer by waiving the licensure fee for those who will attest that their practice will be limited to gratuitous nursing in times of natural or man-made disasters for an organized relief organization or in matters of public health such as immunization centers, public health clinics, or indigent clinics.

**II. POLICY STATEMENT:** To outline the process by which the executive director may approve the issuance of a "Volunteer" nursing license to a professional or practical nurse who is currently licensed or has been duly licensed in Nevada or another state jurisdiction. A nurse carrying such a license will do so with the understanding and under attestation that all nursing practice will be done gratuitously.

**III. PROCEDURE:**

1. The nurse who requests a "Volunteer" nursing license must meet all requirements for initial or renewal of licensure by submitting a standard application and any necessary supporting documentation indicating that she is requesting a "Volunteer" nursing license in the state of Nevada. The \$100 licensure fee will be waived for a "Volunteer" license. Any other licensure fees, including fees for fingerprinting, any endorsement or verification fees, disciplinary databank search fees, or continuing education fees, will not be waived.
2. Support documentation for a "Volunteer" nursing license must include a written and authenticated request for consideration for a

"Volunteer" license by an organized relief organization or a public health entity outlining the practice parameters of the gratuitous nursing setting in which the nurse will be working.

3. The application shall include an attestation by the nurse that all nursing practice under the "Volunteer" license will be done gratuitously (without compensation).
4. Additional prohibitions to issuance of a "Volunteer" license are:
  - a. Any nurse who has been disciplined in Nevada or any other jurisdiction is not eligible for a "Volunteer" license.
  - b. Any nurse who has been convicted of any of the prohibitive offenses as described in NRS Chapter 449 is not eligible for a "Volunteer" license.
  - c. Any nurse who is currently enrolled in the NSBN's Alternative Program for Chemically Dependent Nurses or any other state's confidential or diversion program is not eligible for a "Volunteer" license.
  - d. Any nurse who is currently under investigation by the NSBN or any other jurisdiction is not eligible for a "Volunteer" license.
5. The application for initial or renewal of a "Volunteer" licensure and the supporting documentation shall be reviewed by licensure staff and be forwarded to the Board's executive director for final disposition.
6. The executive director will direct Board staff

to issue the "Volunteer" license if:

- a. The nurse meets the requirements for an initial license or for renewal of license,
  - b. The nurse has attested that all nursing practice under the "Volunteer" license will be done gratuitously,
  - c. The support documentation from the organized relief organization or public health entity outlines appropriate parameters for practice, and
  - d. The nurse is not otherwise prohibited from issuance of a "Volunteer" license.
7. Any nurse who practices under a "Volunteer" license is subject to all provisions of Chapter 632 of the NRS and the NAC that governs the practice of nursing in the state of Nevada.
  8. The "Volunteer" license must be renewed every other year on the nurse's birthday. The nurse is required to submit documentation validating ongoing "Volunteer" status at the time of renewal which prevents her from renewing her "Volunteer" license online. She must submit a paper renewal for consideration before her license lapses or she will be subject to a late renewal fee.
  9. Any nurse who practices under a "Volunteer" license for compensation is subject to disciplinary action by the NSBN and shall immediately cease and desist practicing any type of nursing while under investigation by the NSBN.

Adopted by the Board: January 14, 2009