

Seeking a Friend for the CCHP-A Exam

by Barbara S. Granner, CCHP

In 2019, 10 people took the Certified Correctional Health Professional – Advanced exam, the largest number in one year, bringing the total number of CCHP-As to 41.

In addition to having the requisite education, experience, documentation, degrees and diplomas, these 10 had a “secret weapon”: a buddy, or a group of buddies, to share the experience and encourage them along the way.

It was over coffee at an NCCHC conference that Johnnie Lambert, RN, Johnny Wu, MD, and Denise Rahaman, MBA, RN, decided the time had come. “If I hadn’t connected with them I might not have taken the step,” says Lambert. “I had thought about it over the years, but never committed until Denise said, ‘Let’s make a pact to do it this year.’”

Tracey Titus, RN, says she always thought the Advanced designation was out of reach, until she made a pact with Jeffrey Alvarez, MD, that pushed her “over the edge.”

Mari Knight, MSN, RN, teamed up with Josie Mabalay, MA. Says Knight: “If it weren’t for the two of us doing it together, I’m not sure I would have stuck with it. We carried each other and spurred each other on. I thought I could do it on my own ... but I never did.”

Team members supported each other in so many ways: simply touching base and providing a friendly nudge or reminder about deadlines, discussing potential exam questions, encouraging and cheerleading when the going got rough and, on the day of the test, having a friendly face in the exam room. “We both vacillated depending on what was on our plate,” says Mabalay. “When she was busy, I provided her with a list of helpful articles I had read. When I was ready to back out, she lifted me up.”

Acing the Exam ... and the Application

For these CCHP-A testers, completing the exam application was the first and perhaps highest hurdle to jump. Unlike the other CCHP exams, CCHP-A requires an in-depth application that details the individual’s experience and contributions to correctional health care—and the application itself is reviewed for acceptance. That can be daunting for those who doubt their own accomplishments, or their organizational skills. “Getting myself organized was the hardest part: finding references, updating my resume, putting all the documentation in order,” says Lambert.

Having a buddy creates accountability—or friendly competition! Says Mabalay, “Mari got her application completed right away, and being competitive in nature, I had to get mine done, too.”

CCHP-A candidates take an essay test, with four hours to complete it. While that might sound exhausting, last year’s cohort was pleasantly surprised to find themselves feeling well prepared. “On the day of the exam I felt good and confident. All the stress and anxiety were gone,” reports Knight.

“I didn’t think I would have enough to say, but I used every bit of the four hours,” says Titus.

Words used to describe the test include fun, challenging, “not as difficult as I expected” and pertinent. “It was like a typical day at work,” says Wu. “It asked about the type of situations I encounter and have to think through every day.”



Correctional health professionals mingle at the CCHP-A lounge at NCCHC’s 2019 National Conference

The key to success, everyone agrees, is to understand the NCCHC standards, not merely recite them.

“You need to know the standards inside, outside and upside down,” says Lambert. “You don’t need to quote them, but you need to know what they mean and how to apply them.”

Some Friendly Advice

If you are considering applying to take the Advanced exam, consider this advice from 2019’s newly minted CCHP-As:

- Plan ahead – way ahead. Start the application process months in advance.
- Be prepared to describe what you have done to advance correctional health care. That includes publishing, presenting, serving on NCCHC committees and the like.
- Study the NCCHC standards. Think: How do you use this standard to do your job? In the words of Jeff Alvarez, “Get the book. Read the book. Understand the book.”
- And do like they did, with a little help from your friends.

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Thanks to the CCHP-As interviewed for this article:

Johnnie Lambert, RN, CCHP-A, consultant (in photo above, in red); Denise Rahaman, MBA, RN, CCHP-RN, CCHP-A, executive director for corrections, CFG Health Systems (far right); Tracey Titus, RN, CCHP-RN, CCHP-A, director of policy and accreditation, Centurion (in black and white). Not pictured: Jeffrey Alvarez, MD, CCHP-P, CCHP-A, chief medical officer, Western states, NaphCare; Mari Knight, MSN, RN, CCHP-RN, CCHP-A, director of clinical programs, CFG Health Systems; Josie Mabalay, MA, CCHP-A, medical program director, Cermak Health Services at Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center; Johnny Wu, MD, CCHP-P, CCHP-A, chief of clinical operations, Centurion

For more advice, see “Preparing for the CCHP-A Exam” at www.ncchc.org.