

## **You Need to Complete 24 Contact Hours of Continuing Education to Renew Your License!**

### **How many contact hours do I need and by when?**

RN, LPNs and APRNs all need to have 24 contact hours during their two-year licensing period. A licensing period begins on January 1 of one year and completes December 31 of the next year – half of Montana nurse licensees expire in even years, and half expire in odd years. If you have been licensed the full 24 months of a licensing period, you will need 24 contact hours by end of the licensing period.

For those licensees renewing in 2019 only, because of the renewal changes made by the Board in 2018, contact hours will be accepted from 2017, 2018 and 2019. The Board made this decision when it contemplated the renewal changes because the change was taking place during the course of “odd year licensees” (those licensees who now expire 12/31/2019) license period, and if someone had been very proactive and gathered all 24 of their contact hours in 2017, the consensus was that licensee should not be punished for being proactive.

### **What proof of completion of these contacts hours will I need to have before renewing my license online?**

You do not need proof to renew. You do need to maintain records of the contact hours you have obtained, as the Board does complete a random audit after each renewal period to ensure compliance with the continuing education requirement. Records of contact hours obtained should be maintained for two years after renewal.

### **Don't APRNs have DIFFERENT requirements for continuing education?**

Yes and no. They need a total of 24 contact hours and if they hold prescriptive authority 12 of those contact hours must be in the area of pharmacotherapeutics. Board rules read that “licensees holding dual licenses [such as an RN and APRN license] are required to meet the continuing education requirement for only the most advanced level of licensure” (ARM 24.15.2102).

### **DO NEW GRADS need to have contact hours too? They just graduated!**

The Board did discuss this and felt that a professional commitment of all nurses should be lifelong learning – what better way to start the process? New grads do need contact hours – but they are pro-rated so think of it as 1 contact hour per month licensed in the licensing period.

### **If I am only licensed for 6 months of the current licensing period, do I still need to have the full 24 contact hours?**

NO. The requirements are pro-rated. This means that you are only held to the requirement for the 6 months which would be 6 contact hours. Think of it this way – 24 contact hours for a 24-month period = 1 contact hour per month licensed. SO... if you are a new grad or new to the state, you may only need to complete 6 contact hours if you are licensed only for 6 months in the licensing period.

**Do I have to take the contact hours one per month? Or can I take them all at the same time? Or right before I renew my license?**

You can take these however you want. You can take one per month, all 24 in one day, or on any day during the licensing period. That is up to you.

**Can I take online courses?**

There is no restriction on the type of course you take. You may take these online, in person in a classroom setting, over a teleconference, on a webinar, through reading a booklet or article. There are many ways to fulfil the requirement.

**I am enrolled in college classes to advance my nursing degree. Can I use these courses toward the requirement?**

YES! and congratulations for advancing your education in nursing! You can use your college credits and it is a good way to meet the requirement. Here is the conversion: 1 semester credit = 15 contact hours and 1 quarter hour credit = 12.5 contact hours. With one 3 credit semester class you are done and more!

**If I take more than 24 contact hours in one two year period – can I use them for the next renewal?**

Sorry – no. You can only use the course you took during the licensure period, you cannot carry over credits or go back in time.

**Can I take the same course more than once in the same licensing period?**

Yes you can, there is no restriction for taking the same course more than once in the same licensing period.

**What CANNOT be used to satisfy the renewal requirement?**

Basically any activity that does not have some type of contact hours awarded by an accrediting agency cannot be used - such as reading a journal article that was not awarded contact hours from an accrediting organization. Other activities like being a preceptor or participating in clinical research or community or volunteer services or being a member of a professional organization would also not qualify for continuing education.

**What courses meet the requirements? Are courses approved by the MT Board of Nursing?**

Many offerings meet the requirements. The Board does NOT approve individual courses or providers. The Board did not want to be in the approval business.

See this rule: [ARM 24.159.2101](#) (2). You can find this on the Board website: [www.nurse.mt.gov](http://www.nurse.mt.gov) under the Regulations tab – then administrative rules – Subchapter 21 Renewals and Continuing Education:

(2) To qualify as contact hours, continuing education courses must be approved by an accrediting organization or provided by an academic institution of higher learning, a continuing education provider, or an APRN certifying body.

This leaves a lot of choices for the licensee to choose what is most relevant to their continued competence development. That is the intent of the Board.

**What accrediting organizations does the Board recognize?**

MANY! See this definition of accrediting organization found in [ARM 24.159.301 \(1\)](#)

(1) "Accrediting organization" means a professional organization that establishes standards and criteria for continuing education programs.

**So this means that I don't have to take courses that are only accredited for nursing – I can take courses accredited for other professionals?**

YES! The Board knows that there are many excellent programs out there that will help you gain new knowledge that will help your practice.

**Would approval from another state board of nursing meet the definition of an accrediting organization?**

YES! Some state boards do make approvals and another state board of nursing could be considered an accrediting organization.

**How about those mailers I get from companies – doesn't the Board send those to me?**

The Board does not send any mailers to you about continuing education, no booklets, nor catalogs. Companies buy the mailing list and send their own advertisements. You will have to look at what you get carefully to see if these companies have accreditation for example from ANCC or from another board of nursing to make sure this meets the MT requirements.

**Do I send in my certificates of completion to the Board?**

No – please keep your certificates in a safe place for yourself for at least two years after the last day of the renewal period during which the continuing education was obtained. You may be chosen in a random audit after the licensing period at which point you would be asked to provide the Board these certificates as PROOF that you have completed the requirements.

**What will happen if I get audited?**

You will be notified by email and mail – so PLEASE keep your mailing and email address and contact information up to date with the Board. **(To change your address go to the website [www.nurse.mt.gov](http://www.nurse.mt.gov) and fill in an address change from the front page under Board Information.)** Should you be audited,

you will then be asked to send in copies of your certificates or your college transcripts to verify that you have completed the requirements.

**What if I did not complete the contact hours? Will my license be taken away?**

If after being audited and you have not complied with the requirement, you may be given an administrative suspension of your license. This means your license will be suspended if you do not meet the requirements and you will not be able to practice nursing until you make up the deficiency. The lesson: BE PROACTIVE and MEET THE REQUIREMENT!

**Can I be audited two renewal periods in a row?!**

It is possible as this is a random audit selection of licensees.

**I want to read the rules related to this requirement!**

You do? That is great! I love it when licensees want to read the rules. The easiest way to find them is to go to the website: [www.nurse.mt.gov](http://www.nurse.mt.gov) at Regulations, choose Administrative Rules, then choose Rule Subchapter: 24.159.21 – Renewals and Continuing Education. You may also want to check definitions Subchapter 24.159.301 for terms in that you want to better understand. Good luck!

**I am so confused – who should I talk to if I have questions about this?!!**

You might want to first talk to another nursing colleague to get answers to your questions. If you feel you are still confused – please feel free to contact the Executive Officer for the Board of Nursing at [nurse@mt.gov](mailto:nurse@mt.gov).