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Foreign nurses to take new test

By REUBEN S. SEGURITAN

Foreign nurse graduates who wish to enter the United States and practice nursing will soon be required to pass a one-day examination, the Commission of Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) announced recently.

The first such examination will be given on Oct. 4, 1978 in thirty locations including Manila, Philippines. It will test proficiency in both nursing practice and English comprehension. No test will be given in the US this year.

Five areas of nursing, namely medical, surgical, obstetric and psychiatric nursing, will be covered by the examination, Adele Herwitz, CGFNS executive director said. The same subjects are now included in the state licensure examinations.

In a press release, the CGFNS noted that obtaining a CGFNS certificate (evidence of passing the exam) will have something to do with the eligibility of a nurse for preference visa and for work permit. The Commission also expects such certificate to be imposed as a requirement for taking the state licensure examination.

It is not clear at this time how such requirement will affect nurses who are already here. Ms. Herwitz, however, said that the new exam will not be the counterpart of the ECFMG exam for foreign medical graduates. "The ECFMG certificate is a requirement for graduate medical education while the CGFNS will be a requirement for work," Ms. Herwitz said in a telephone interview.

Also unclear is the immigration aspect of the exam. According to Ms. Herwitz, the INS has advised the CGFNS that "it would be prepared" to require nurses to pass the new exam. There are no details yet, however, as to the INS Policy on the matter.

The CGFNS is an independent non-profit organization that was recently established under the sponsorship of the American Nurses' Association and the National League for Nursing "to assure the profession's responsibility concerning foreign nurses wishing to immigrate to the United States."

According to the CGFNS the new exam will assure a higher percentage for foreign nurses to pass the state licensure exam. Between 1972 and 1976, more than 42,000 foreign nurse graduates came to the United States. Of the 15,077 foreign nurse graduates who took the state licensure exam in 1975, fewer than 20 percent passed. In 1976 84 percent failed.

Ms. Herwitz observed that because of the high percentage of failure in the state licensure exam among foreign nurses, there have been charges of discrimination. "Unlicensed nurses have been exploited by being placed in lowpaid positions in hospitals and other health care centers. They have been hired as nurses aides and then pushed into taking registered nurse responsibilities on unpopular night shifts and/or in out-of-the-way communities," she continued.