



**Health Services**  
LOS ANGELES COUNTY

October 23, 2008

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**TO:** Each Supervisor

**FROM:** John F. Schunhoff, PhD.   
Interim Director

**SUBJECT: MLK MACC NURSE COMPETENCY TESTING**

On October 17, 2008, we provided your Board with a status report on our implementation of recommendations from the Auditor-Controller's recent investigation of personnel practices at the former Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK) – Harbor Medical Center.

The audit report raised questions regarding past nurse competency testing at the MLK Multi-Service Ambulatory Care Center (MACC). As a result, the Department of Health Services (DHS) planned to conduct interim testing of the MLK MACC nurses during October 2008.

Late last week, DHS and MLK MACC managers met with nurses and Service Employees International Union (SEIU) representatives, at their request, to discuss questions related to the planned nurse competency testing. Among other issues, the nurses expressed concern with inconsistencies and typos they indicated were in the pre-test study materials.

As a result, DHS agreed to delay the MLK MACC nurse competency testing to allow time for the study materials to be re-checked and, where necessary, to be revised accordingly. The nurses would then be able to study the revised study materials and practice skills in advance of the testing. We notified your offices of this action via email on October 17. This memo is to provide you with additional information regarding this process.

Review of Pre-Test Study Materials

Based on our review of the pre-test study materials provided to the MLK MACC nurses, we noted the following:

- In an effort to proactively prepare nurses for the test, MLK nursing administration distributed study materials from prior tests to the MLK MACC nursing staff in September. This created some confusion when revised materials approved by the Nurse Competency Committee (with representation by nurse educators from major DHS facilities and others) were distributed to the nurses in October. The revised materials were specifically tailored to address this round of testing.

**John F. Schunhoff, Ph.D.**  
Interim Director

**Robert G. Splawn, MD**  
Interim Chief Medical Officer

313 N. Figueroa Street, Suite 912  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Tel: (213) 240-8101  
Fax: (213) 481-0503

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- Some two-sided study materials were copied on only one side, resulting in missing pages. The study materials also contained two material typographical errors related to medication safety.
- There were several issues raised by the nurses and the Union regarding the manner in which some specific tests would be conducted as well as needed clarification regarding the correct answers to some of the questions.

Given these issues, as noted above, DHS managers made the decision to delay the initial round of testing, which had been scheduled to begin on Monday, October 20. The additional time will also permit us to obtain feedback from the nurses regarding possible errors and omissions, if any, beyond those we have already identified, verify the completeness and accuracy of the study materials, and provide time for nurses to review the final study materials and practice the required skills, consistent with practices for nurse competency testing in the private sector.

### Next Steps

Vivian Branchick, the DHS Chief Nursing Officer, will be directly responsible for managing, reviewing, and controlling all aspects of the pre-test study materials and the testing process itself. Ms. Branchick will work closely with MLK MACC and the Nurse Competency Committee to ensure that these competency tests are conducted according to appropriate professional standards.

The testing materials and study packets are currently being revised to include appropriate feedback. Carol Meyer, Interim Chief Network Officer, Carolyn Clark, Interim MLK MACC CEO, and Ms. Branchick will meet with Union management to respond to testing concerns and study materials. The Office of Nursing Affairs will make copies of the testing materials and study packets, which will be distributed to the nurses on or before October 27. Competency testing will be scheduled for November 17 - 19, to be conducted by a team of nurse educators from various DHS facilities. Scheduling testing during the week of November 10 was not feasible due to the holiday and pre-scheduled vacations by several nurse educators.

Nurses will be allowed one retest for any of the required competency skills that they fail during the first test. Any required retesting will be completed before the Thanksgiving holiday.

### Summary

DHS' overriding goal is to ensure the high quality of patient care provided at all of our facilities. Nurse competency testing is part of this effort, and we strive for a testing process that is not only fair, but also perceived as being fair to those involved.

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We believe that the decision to delay the testing was greatly preferable to running the risk of proceeding with misinterpretations and confusion. The additional time will result in a more successful competency testing process for the MLK MACC and its dedicated nursing staff. Based on this experience, we will also ensure that a quality review methodology is added to the testing process for all future testing at DHS facilities.

We appreciate the professional nature of the discussions with the MLK MACC nursing representatives and SEIU, and we look forward to maintaining a positive working relationship as we move forward to standardize and improve our competency testing processes.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

JFS:jj

c: Chief Executive Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors