

US tightens screening of 2006 nursing board passers

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DOES the stigma attached to the country's latest batch of nurses remain?

An American organization that determines the eligibility of foreign-trained nurses to work in the United States is not about to accept - just yet - applicants from among the passers of the tainted June 2006 nursing licensure exams.

In a statement posted at its website, the Commission on Graduates of Foreign Nursing Schools (CGFNS) said it was still reviewing "whether the licensure process followed in light of the challenged results of the June 2006 exam is comparable with that required for nurses licensed in America, as required by U.S. law."

After the evaluation, the CGFNS said it would determine "in the near future" whether the June batch applicants were eligible for VisaScreen certification.

VisaScreen refers to the program offered by the CGFNS' International Commission on Healthcare Professions that helps foreign health care professionals qualify for certain occupational visas. It does so by "verifying and evaluating their credentials to ensure that they meet the government's minimum eligibility standards."

"Any VisaScreen applications that CGFNS receives from June 2006 passers will be accepted but deferred for a final decision until this assessment process is complete," the CGFNS said in the statement.

"If the assessment concludes that the license is not comparable, the VisaScreen application from a June 2006 passer will be denied."

Professor Zenaida Famorca of the University of Santo Tomas' College of Nursing said Monday this was the first time that the CGFNS came up with such a condition for Filipino nurses.

"We never had this in the past, especially since our nursing education system in the Philippines is very similar to that in the US," she told the Inquirer.

The CGFNS provides the certification exam usually required by many American states before foreign nurses could take the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) administered by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing.

The CGFNS said it arrived at its decision on the June passers following a meeting of its board of trustees last October 22 and 23.

The agenda was "whether Philippine nurses who have passed the Professional Regulation Commission's June 2006 nursing licensing exam are eligible for VisaScreen certification."

"This is precisely the kind of reaction from would-be employers that we worked so hard to prevent," said Famorca whose college -- along with representatives of the University of the Philippines, University of the East, and the Far Eastern University -- favored a total retake.

Considering the circumstances, she said it was ironic that those who actually flunked in the June exams were luckier since they weren't among the applicants being watched by the CGFNS.

"Lucky for them, they don't have the stigma because they're not part of the batch in question," she said.

A nursing graduate of a Quezon City school who landed in the June exams' top ten said she was not surprised with the CGFNS decision.

"Just as I expected, after all this, our application for the US remained blocked because of this controversy," she said.

The newly-licensed nurse blamed the Court of Appeals for deciding against an unconditional retake for all examinees "as if no leakage had happened."

"We really can't pretend that no leakage happened," she said. "We didn't do anything about it on our own so now, the US is going to do something about it. If we had all taken the exams again months ago, this would have been a non-issue now."

Last week, the appellate court gave the go-signal for the oath-taking of 17,000 June passers, following a five-hour conciliation talk with different stakeholders.

Among them were representatives from the PRC, Board of Nursing, Office of the Solicitor General, and some petitioners who had asked the CA to reconsider its Oct. 13 decision for a selective retake.

In the decision, the CA said only the 1,687 examinees, whose names were added in the list of passers after a recomputation of tests scores, were to take Tests III and V again.