



**HF-Cert**  
Heart Failure Certification Program

# HF-CERT™ HANDBOOK

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The policies and procedures specified in the HF-Cert Handbook are subject to change. The current Handbook will always be available for download from the HFSA website.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Table of Contents.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
History .....	4
Mission .....	4
Certification Council Scope.....	4
<b>About the Heart Failure Certification .....</b>	<b>5</b>
Purpose: Heart Failure Certification.....	5
Certification .....	5
Value of Certification.....	5
Eligibility .....	6
<b>Applying for the Examination .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Application Requirements.....	9
Applying for the HF-Cert.....	10
Eligibility Period.....	10
Testing Accommodations for Candidates with Disabilities .....	10
Examination Dates, Deadlines and Fees.....	11
<b>Scheduling the Examination.....</b>	<b>12</b>
Scheduling an Exam.....	12
Rescheduling, Cancellations, No Shows and Refunds .....	12
<b>Preparing for the Examination.....</b>	<b>13</b>
How the Examination Is Developed .....	13
Examination Content.....	14
<b>Taking the Examination .....</b>	<b>17</b>
Testing Sites.....	17
Test Center Administrator/Proctor .....	18
Identification .....	18
Test Site Security .....	19
Candidate Feedback .....	19
Candidate Misconduct .....	20
Copyright Information.....	20
Testing Irregularities.....	20
<b>After the Examination.....</b>	<b>20</b>
Notification of Exam Results .....	20
Understanding Your Scores .....	21
Validation of Scores.....	21
Verification of Exam Results.....	21
Re-Examination .....	21
Exam Appeals .....	22
<b>Maintaining Your Certification.....</b>	<b>22</b>

Purpose and Rationale .....	22
Recertification Requirements.....	23
Recertification Requirements Rationale .....	24
Acceptable Continuing Education .....	24
Recertification Application Verification .....	25
Recertification Acceptance.....	25
Failure to Recertify .....	25
Reinstatement.....	26
<b>Code of Ethics .....</b>	<b>26</b>
Introduction.....	26
Purpose .....	27
Code of Ethics.....	27
<b>Miscellaneous Policies .....</b>	<b>28</b>
Statement of Fairness and Nondiscrimination .....	28
Confidentiality .....	28
Changes in Contact Information.....	29
Records Retention .....	29
Statement of Compliance with All Laws .....	29
Certification Verification .....	29
Designation & Certificate .....	30
Certificates and digital badges .....	31
<b>Complaints and Disciplinary Actions .....</b>	<b>31</b>
Disciplinary and Appeals Policy .....	31
<b>HFSA Request for Testing Accommodations Form .....</b>	<b>36</b>

## INTRODUCTION

The HF-Cert™ Handbook provides information essential to the certification process from application, through examination and recertification.

## HISTORY

The Heart Failure Society of America, Inc. (“HFSA”) is a Connecticut not for profit corporation exempt from federal income taxation under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. HFSA is a national association dedicated to providing a platform to improve and expand heart failure care through collaboration, education, innovation, research, and advocacy.

The HFSA Certification Council is a division of the HFSA, Inc., established in 2021 to develop a non-governmental professional certification program for heart failure providers. The HFSA Certification Council has authority for the ongoing development and maintenance of the HF-Cert certification program and for the Certification Council’s policies as defined in the Governance Charter, subject to oversight by the HFSA Board of Directors and the CEO. Oversight is defined as ensuring the Council operates within the authority of this charter and follows established Council policies.

## MISSION

The mission of the Certification Council is to provide independent, verifiable evidence of proficiency in heart failure practice through a nationally recognized and rigorous certification program.

## CERTIFICATION COUNCIL SCOPE

The HFSA Certification Council is the certifying body for the Heart Failure Certification program. The Certification Council is responsible for overseeing the development of certification for heart failure providers, implementing policies and procedures for this certification program, and overseeing the development of the certification examination. The Certification Council is dedicated to promoting the heart failure providers’ responsibility in maintaining high quality standards to advance ethical practice and to advocate for professional development to ensure that patients served receive safe, efficient care now and in the future.

The Council is solely responsible for essential decisions related to the development, administration/delivery, and ongoing maintenance and monitoring of the certification program subject to oversight by the HFSA Board of Directors and CEO. Oversight of the Council by the Board of Directors and CEO is defined as ensuring the Council operates within the authority of its charter and follows its established policies. The Council ensures that all application and initial eligibility requirements, examination development and administration activities, recertification application and eligibility requirements, and all certification program policies and procedures are directly related to the purpose of each certification program.

Development and maintenance of the HF-Cert examination is based on a Job Analysis Study process that is designed to ascertain, directly from practicing professionals, the frequency with which prerequisite knowledge is applied in practice and the importance or criticality of this knowledge in heart failure practice. Content is added to the examination only after it has been identified through the Job Analysis Study process and accepted by subject matter experts.

## ABOUT THE HEART FAILURE CERTIFICATION

### PURPOSE: HEART FAILURE CERTIFICATION

The Heart Failure Certification (HF-Cert™) has been developed to recognize providers who have demonstrated advanced-level knowledge and skill to provide competent heart failure services in the United States. Heart failure providers demonstrate proficiency in a variety of settings including but not limited to academic medical centers, hospitals, medical group practices, ambulatory care, long term care, and military treatment facilities.

The HF-Cert professional provides assessment, treatment, and management of the patient with heart failure by ideally, or preferably, utilizing a multidisciplinary team approach in a patient-centered manner. Such a provider could include a cardiologist, internist, hospitalist, emergency physician, intensivist, family practitioner, clinical pharmacist, and a registered nurse with a graduate degree.

By passing the HF-Cert examination, heart failure providers not only display their aptitude in each specialized knowledge area, but also present their expertise in heart failure with a HF-Cert credential.

The Heart Failure Certification program:

- Validates professional expertise
- Protects the public
- Distinguishes the heart failure profession
- Differentiates heart failure providers in a competitive job market
- Encourages education providers to develop programming that will improve the knowledge and performance of heart failure providers through academic training and professional development opportunities
- Provides a learning path that recognizes career-long professional development
- Improves awareness of heart failure by related disciplines

### CERTIFICATION

Professional certification is a process by which an entity grants formal recognition to individuals that meet predetermined, standardized criteria. The certification process involves determination of eligibility, an assessment of demonstration of competence, and requirements for regular recertification. Certification is usually voluntary and established by a non-governmental entity. HFSA's HF-Cert is a professional certification.

### VALUE OF CERTIFICATION

HF-Cert designees benefit from:

- Increased recognition by peers and respect of colleagues in the profession
- Improved opportunities for employability and advancement
- Greater confidence in their professional competence
- Increased professional trust from employers or the public
- Increased autonomy in the workplace
- Better compensation and career longevity

Patients/Consumers benefit from:

- Objective, independent, third-party evaluation and assessment of professional competence
- Commitment to public safety and/or consumer protection
- Accountability through ethical conduct standards and/or a disciplinary process
- Recertification requirements for continued or enhanced competence

Employers benefit from:

- Qualified individuals for employment or advancement
- Recertification requirements for continued or enhanced competence
- Commitment to public safety and/or consumer protection
- Reduced risk of errors, accidents and/or legal liability
- Reduced employee turnover and increased job satisfaction
- Justification for potential compensation differential

## ELIGIBILITY

HFSA has developed eligibility requirements to ensure that the certification application process is fair and impartial. Membership is not a prerequisite for the HF-Cert program.

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### ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

All individuals who seek certification must meet the established eligibility requirements in effect at the time of application.

#### Education

Applicants must have earned one of the following advanced degrees:

- **Registered Nurse:** A graduate degree (e.g., MSN, DNP, PhD)
- **Pharmacist:** A Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy (BSP Pharm – graduated on or prior to 2005) or Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD)
- **Physician:** A Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) plus completion of a residency in family medicine or internal medicine
- **Physician Assistant:** Master of Science in Physician Assistant or Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies

#### Licensure

Applicants must have one of the following active licenses in good standing, with no current restrictions or pending actions, in the United States:

- Registered Nurse
- Pharmacist
- Physician
- Physician Assistant

## **Experience**

Applicants have two options to meet the Experience requirement:

- Option 1: Applicants with at least three (3) years of documented experience and a minimum of 1,240 clinical hours during the previous two (2) years that have a practice focus in heart failure across the HF-Cert content domains will have satisfied the Experience requirement.
- Option 2: Physicians who have completed a dedicated one (1) year (non-accredited) heart failure fellowship that includes a minimum of 1,240 clinical practice hours will have satisfied the Experience requirement.

\*Eligible experience is attained after completion of the respective advanced degree.

## **Background, Code of Ethics, and Application Accuracy Attestation**

Applicants must attest to comply with the HFSA Code of Ethics and report any State Board suspensions. Any State Board suspension must be reported to HFSA within 15 days. Applicants and certificants must abide to practice heart failure specialty in a manner consistent with the certification standards and responsibilities set forth in the HFSA's Code of Ethics. Applicants must attest to the accuracy of information reported within the application.

## **Examination**

Applicants must achieve a passing score on the HF-Cert examination.

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## **ELIGIBILITY RATIONALE**

Each eligibility requirement has been established to ensure that certified individuals have an acceptable level of knowledge, as evidenced by the examination and education requirements, and skill, as evidenced by the experience requirement, needed to provide heart failure services at an advanced proficiency level.

A rationale for each eligibility requirement has been established as follows:

### **Education**

Applicants must have earned an advanced degree. The level of education required for the HF-Cert credential is consistent with the level of education required to practice as a registered nurse with advanced education, pharmacist, physician, or physician assistant.

A graduate degree for RNs (e.g. MSN, DNP, PhD); or Bachelor of Science in Pharmacy (BSP Pharm – graduated on or prior to 2005) or Doctor of Pharmacy (PharmD); or Doctor of Medicine (MD) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (DO) plus completion of a residency in family medicine or internal medicine; or Master of Science in Physician Assistant or Master of Science in Physician Assistant Studies, granted by a US regionally accredited college/university or foreign equivalent is required as a basic measure of the quality of the registered nurse's, pharmacist's, physician's, or physician assistant's education.

### **Licensure**

The requirement for a current, active registered nurse, pharmacist, physician, or physician assistant license in good standing is consistent with the state requirements to practice as a registered nurse, pharmacist, physician, or physician assistant in the US.



Requiring that the license is full, current and unrestricted is necessary to demonstrate that the registered nurse, pharmacist, physician, or physician assistant has no unresolved disciplinary issues as a measure to increase public protection.

### **Experience**

Option 1: The minimum three (3) years requirement is necessary to ensure applicants have adequate post-graduate experience for the advanced proficiency of the HF-Cert examination.

Completion of 1,240 hours during the previous two (2) years ensures that applicants have adequate clinical work experience. All hours must be related to the four (4) domains of the HF-Cert examination content outline. The Certification Council acknowledges that accumulating 1,240 hours represents a minimum of 30% direct clinical practice in the care of patients with heart failure.

Option 2: Applicants completing a dedicated non-accredited heart failure fellowship that includes at least 1,240 clinical heart failure practice hours will have completed intensive training within a condensed period during which they will have encountered and interacted with a range of practical scenarios and issues that heart failure practitioners face.

### **Background, Code of Ethics, and Application Accuracy Attestation**

HFSA candidates and certificants have the obligation to: maintain and demonstrate high standards of integrity and professional conduct; accept responsibility for their actions; continually seek to enhance their professional capabilities; practice with fairness and honesty; and encourage others to act in a professional manner. The requirement for adherence to the Code of Ethics provides increased awareness of expected ethical behaviors as well as increased public protection through a process that provides a reporting and investigation mechanism for Code of Ethics violations. Candidates must attest to the accuracy of their application information to declare they have met the requisite eligibility criteria.

### **Examination**

Applicants are required to pass the HF-Cert examination to demonstrate that their education, experience, and training have resulted in sufficient understanding of the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to provide safe and competent evidence-based heart failure services as determined by the job analysis studies and represented on the examination content outline.

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## **ELIGIBILITY VERIFICATION**

Only complete certification applications will be accepted. Licensure will be verified with the state licensing board for all applicants prior to approval to sit for the HF-Cert exam. A percentage of applications will be selected for random audit. If selected for audit, HFSA will review the applicant's submitted documentation and contact employers to verify education and experience requirements before the applicant is approved for testing. Should deficiencies be found, the application will be returned to the applicant who may address the deficiencies and resubmit the application for review, adhering to established application deadlines.

Verification of each eligibility requirement will be conducted by HFSA certification staff as follows:

**Education:** *Physicians, physician assistants, and pharmacists:* no education documentation required as verification of current, active license will also serve as verification for this criterion.

RNs: Applicant will provide a copy of the diploma for the graduate degree granted by a US regionally accredited college/university or foreign equivalent.

**Licensure:** Applicant will provide license type, license number, expiration date, state of license, verification web address, and a copy of the license in the application. Licensure will be verified with the relevant board for all applicants.

**Experience:** Option 1: To document the 1,240 clinical hours of heart failure practice in the previous two years, applicants will complete the Practice Information section within the application noting the number of hours in the previous two years in each HF-Cert examination content domain.

Applicants will provide employer name and contact information for at least three years of practice experience. Multiple employers may be submitted.

Applicants will attest to the accuracy of the information reported when completing the application.

If selected for audit, an applicant's employer(s) will be asked to verify the applicant has accrued at least 1,240 hours of clinical heart failure experience within the previous two years and has a minimum of three years of heart failure experience.

Option 2: To document satisfactory completion of a dedicated heart failure fellowship, a letter from the applicant's fellowship program director must be submitted attesting to the applicant's completion of 1,240 hours of clinical heart failure experience. The letter must be signed and dated and on an appropriate letterhead.

**Background, Code of Ethics, and application accuracy attestation:**

Applicants will attest on the certification application, and the application will be subject to online verification rules to ensure the attestation is complete.

Note that HFSA reserves the right to verify any information provided on the certification application and/or as part of the application process whether the application is selected for random audit.

## APPLYING FOR THE EXAMINATION

### APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

Before submitting an application, carefully review the information contained in this handbook. Taking the certification examination is voluntary. The HFSA strictly adheres to its eligibility requirements for certification. It is the responsibility of the applicant to comply with all policies and procedures regarding eligibility, the application, and corresponding deadlines.

The online application is available via the link provided on the HFSA website and must be completed in its entirety prior to submission. To apply for the HF-Cert program, the certification application, appropriate fee and required forms/documentation must be submitted electronically via the application portal. Candidates new to the system will need to create a username/password.

## APPLYING FOR THE HF-CERT

To apply for certification, submit the online application form. Once each section of the application is complete including submission of the application fee, the applicant may submit the application. **The application will NOT be received and cannot be reviewed by HFSA until all steps are complete.** Only complete certification applications will be accepted.

Each application section should be completed before exiting the application; however, applicants are not required to complete the application in one sitting. Required fields are indicated with an asterisk within the application.

After submission, HFSA certification staff will verify the information provided (see Eligibility Verification). If selected for audit, applicants will receive notification from HFSA staff with further instruction and deadlines.

Once the application is approved, candidates will receive an email from the testing vendor with instructions to schedule their exam within the next available testing window. Testing windows and associated application deadlines will be published on the HFSA website.

## ELIGIBILITY PERIOD

Approved candidates have a one-year eligibility period in which they may successfully pass the exam. The one-year eligibility period begins on the application approval date. Candidates are subject to the retest policy for any subsequent exam attempts (see Exam Administration).

Any exam attempts outside of the one-year eligibility period require meeting all current eligibility requirements, completing the initial application and submission of the application fee.

## TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS FOR CANDIDATES WITH DISABILITIES

HFSA and the testing vendor will provide reasonable and appropriate testing accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended for individuals with documented disabilities who request and demonstrate the need for accommodation as required by law. ADA regulations define a person with a disability as someone with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. HFSA requires documentation to validate the type and severity of a disability to enable accommodations to be specifically matched with the identified functional limitation, to provide equal access to exam functions for all examinees.

The information provided by candidates and any documentation regarding such disability and special accommodation, will be treated with strict confidentiality and will not be shared with any source, except for HFSA, the testing vendor and proctors, without the candidate's express written permission.

Reasonable accommodations are decided based upon:

- the individual's specific request,
- the individual's specific disability,
- documentation submitted,
- the appropriateness of the request.

Reasonable accommodations do not include steps that fundamentally alter the purpose or nature of the examination. Reasonable accommodations generally are provided for candidates who:

- have a physical or learning impairment that substantially limits that person in one or more major life activities (e.g., walking, talking, hearing, performing manual tasks)
- have a record of such physical or learning impairment
- have been documented as having a physical or learning impairment

Requests for accommodations are reviewed by the HFSA Practice and Patient Programs Department which works in partnership with the testing vendor to ensure appropriate arrangements for all approved requests and to ensure the request can be processed without jeopardizing the integrity or security of the HF-Cert examination. Special accommodations must be requested in advance as part of the application process by indicating the need for a special testing accommodation and submitting the “Requests for Accommodations Form” found in this handbook to the exam application. Accommodation requests are due by the deadline published on the HFSA [website](#).

Prometric communicates with the candidate to schedule a testing appointment to accommodate their needs accordingly.

## EXAMINATION DATES, DEADLINES AND FEES

### DATES AND DEADLINES

Complete applications with all required documentation and fees must be submitted by the published application deadline associated with the applicant’s desired testing window. Testing windows, associated application deadlines, and exam scheduling timelines are published on the HFSA [website](#).

### FEES

#### CERTIFICATION APPLICATION

Member initial certification application/examination fee:	\$350
Nonmember initial certification application/examination fee:	\$580

#### RETESTING (WITHIN THE CANDIDATE’S 1-YEAR ELIGIBILITY PERIOD)

Member retesting fee for applicants who have failed the exam:	\$150
Nonmember retesting fee for applicants who have failed the exam:	\$250

#### RECERTIFICATION

Member recertification fee (due every 5 years with recertification application):	\$200
Nonmember recertification fee (due every 5 years with recertification application):	\$400

#### REINSTATEMENT

Member reinstatement fee (certification expiration is 90 days or less) for certificants:	\$250
Nonmember reinstatement fee (certification expiration is 90 days or less) for certificants:	\$450

### ELIGIBILITY APPEAL

Applicants who are notified that they do not meet the eligibility requirements may appeal this decision by sending a written notice of the appeal to the HFSA Practice and Patient Programs Department staff ([hf-cert@hfsa.org](mailto:hf-cert@hfsa.org))

within 30 days of communication of the adverse eligibility decision. The Practice and Patient Programs Department staff will forward the notice to the Certification Council for review.

The Certification Council will review the applicant's information and will make a final decision regarding eligibility. No new or additional information may be submitted with the appeal request. The eligibility appeal will be reviewed within 45 days of receipt. Written notice of the final decision will be sent to the applicant within 30 days of the review.

The HFSA Certification Council may appoint a subgroup or appeal review task force for the purpose of reviewing eligibility appeals and making final determinations regarding eligibility appeals.

## SCHEDULING THE EXAMINATION

### SCHEDULING AN EXAM

The HF-Cert examination is offered at [Prometric testing centers](#) across the United States. Morning and afternoon exam appointments are available Monday—Friday; weekend hours are available at some testing centers.

Exam applications are accepted on a rolling basis and application deadlines apply. Exam appointments may be scheduled for the next available testing window. Applicants are encouraged to apply at least one month in advance of the application deadline in order to reserve a preferred exam date, time, and location.

Once HF-Cert eligibility is approved by HFSA, candidates will receive notice that their application has been approved. Once the scheduling window opens, candidates will receive email notification from Prometric that provides instructions for scheduling the exam appointment at a Prometric testing center. Candidates may not schedule the exam until this scheduling notice is received.

### RESCHEDULING, CANCELLATIONS, NO SHOWS AND REFUNDS

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#### TESTING APPOINTMENT RESCHEDULE

Candidates who wish to reschedule a testing appointment within the same testing window must do so at least five (5) calendar days prior to the scheduled testing appointment by contacting the testing vendor directly to request the change. Prometric will allow candidates to reschedule with at least five (5) calendar days' notice. Candidates may only reschedule to another date within the current testing window or cancel the testing appointment. Candidates who do not cancel the testing appointment within the required timeframe are subject to the Late Testing Appointment Cancellation or the Late or No Show policy, as applicable.

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#### TRANSFER TO ANOTHER TESTING CYCLE

A candidate who wishes to transfer the exam eligibility to the next testing window must contact Prometric to cancel the exam appointment, if the appointment has been made, and receive confirmation of that cancellation from Prometric. The exam appointment must be cancelled at least five (5) calendar days prior to the scheduled testing appointment to avoid forfeiture of the application fee.

After receiving confirmation of the exam appointment cancellation (if applicable), the candidate may schedule an exam during a subsequent testing window that falls within the candidate's one-year eligibility, window once scheduling for that window is available.

HFSA reserves the right to re-verify licensure status prior to allowing the candidate to schedule an exam appointment for the subsequent testing window.

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#### LATE TESTING APPOINTMENT CANCELLATION

Cancellation requests received less than five (5) calendar days in advance of the scheduled testing appointment, without an approved emergency excuse, will result in forfeiture of the application fee. If the candidate wishes to test during another testing window within the one-year eligibility period, the retake fee will be required at the time of scheduling. If the candidate does not submit the retake fee and does not test within the one-year eligibility window, a full application and testing fee will be required to apply for certification at any point in the future.

HFSA reserves the right to re-verify licensure status prior to allowing the candidate to schedule an exam appointment for the subsequent testing window.

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#### LATE, NO-SHOW, OR INSUFFICIENT ADMISSION DOCUMENTATION

Candidates who arrive late for the testing appointment will not be seated and will forfeit all fees. Candidates who fail to show for the testing appointment (no-show) will forfeit all fees. Candidates who come to the test appointment without the proper identification and/or the proper admission letter will not be admitted to the appointment and will forfeit all fees.

Late or No-Show candidates and those without the proper admission documentation who are denied admission to the testing appointment may schedule a testing appointment during another testing window within the one-year eligibility period by paying the retake fee at the time of scheduling.

HFSA reserves the right to re-verify licensure status prior to allowing the candidate to schedule an exam appointment for the subsequent testing window.

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#### END OF THE ONE-YEAR ELIGIBILITY PERIOD

If any of the above conditions apply, and the one-year eligibility period has ended, the candidate must meet all eligibility requirements, complete an exam application, and submit the full application fee to reapply for certification.

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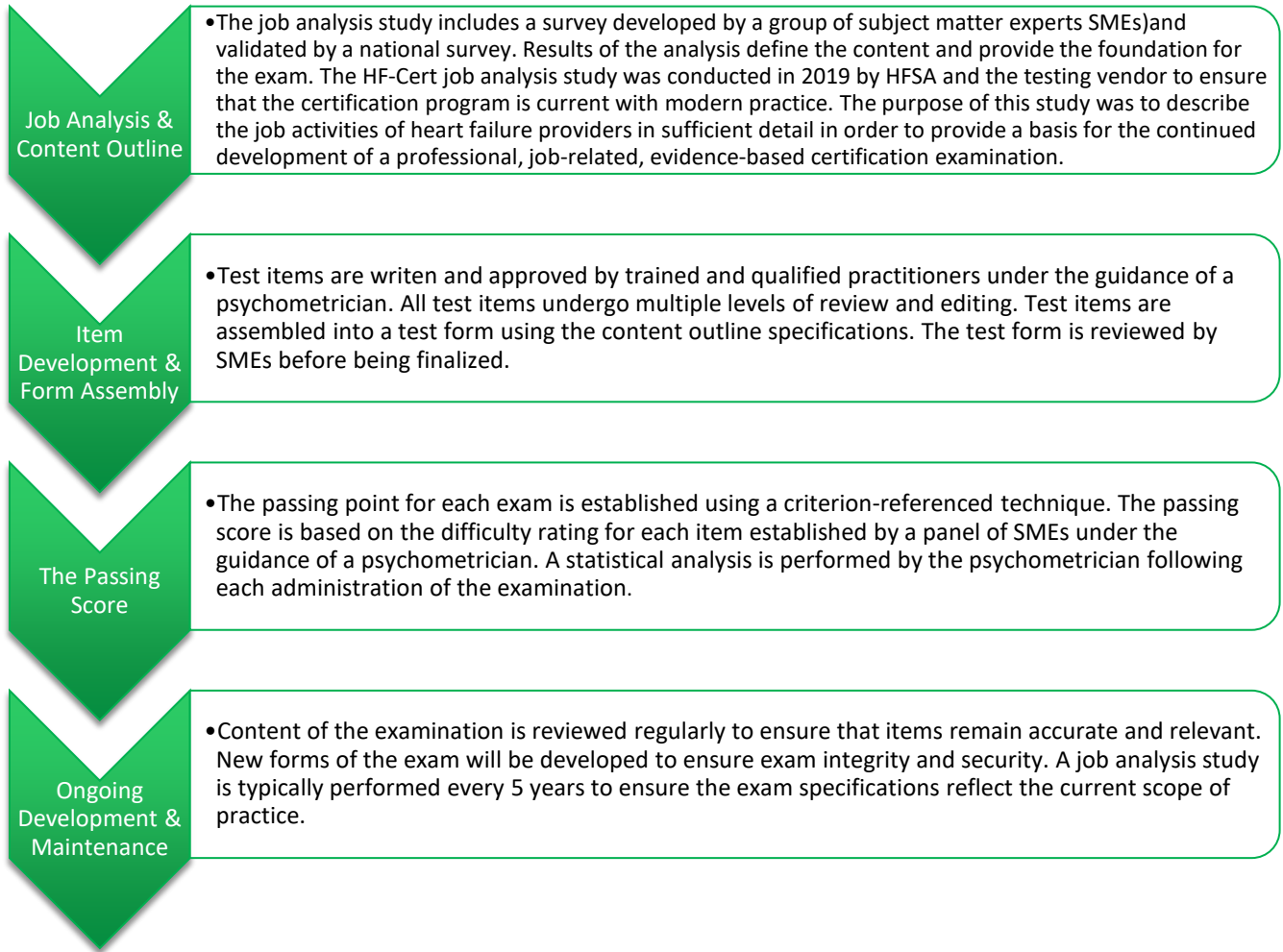
#### REFUNDS

Individuals may request a refund of application or exam fees minus a \$100 processing fee. Initial or retesting application refunds will only be considered if the individual has not completed the exam attempt. Refunds will not be offered for individuals who fail to follow the rescheduling or cancellation policies or fail to bring required documentation to the testing appointment.

### PREPARING FOR THE EXAMINATION

#### HOW THE EXAMINATION IS DEVELOPED

The Certification Council participates in and provides oversight for the development and ongoing maintenance of the certification examination. The HFSA Certification Council and Practice and Patient Programs Department work in partnership with the test development vendor to ensure the examination is developed and maintained in a manner consistent with generally accepted psychometric principles and educational testing practices.



## EXAMINATION CONTENT

The HF-Cert examination consists of 150 multiple-choice questions (125 scored questions and 25 non-scored, pretest questions). Pretesting is conducted to evaluate the performance of an item before being used as a scored item. Candidates will have three (3) hours to complete the computer-based examination. The exam covers the topic areas detailed in the content outline. All exam content is developed based on practice in the United States. The HF-Cert exam is offered only in English.

The HFSA's role is in developing and administering certification examinations to determine the qualifications of candidates for certification. The HFSA does not require, provide, accredit, or endorse any specific study guides, training or review courses, or other examination preparation products. The Certification Council, certification staff, and certification subject matter experts do not have involvement in the creation, accreditation, approval, endorsement or delivery of examination review courses, preparatory materials, educational programs, or training programs/products that prepare candidates for the HF-Cert certification examination. Purchase of review materials is not a requirement for testing, nor does use of any review materials imply successful performance on the HF-Cert certification examination.

Candidates are encouraged to review the HF-Cert content outline in preparation for the examination.

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## HF-CERT EXAM CONTENT OUTLINE

HF-Cert Examination Content Domain	Weight
I. Prevention	19 items
II. Assessment	42 items
III. Management	54 items
IV. Systems of Healthcare	10 items
Total	125 items

### I. Prevention (19 items)

- A. Understand risk factors and comorbidities and their contribution to heart failure (HF) (e.g., age, Chagas disease, hypertension, renal dysfunction, venous thromboembolism).
- B. Educate patients regarding positive health behaviors that promote optimal clinical outcomes (e.g., compliance with medication, diet adherence, flexible diuretic regimen, self-care skills).
- C. Educate patients and caregivers regarding risk of HF symptoms.
- D. Enhance provider and patient communication in discharge planning and care transitions to reduce hospital readmissions among patients with heart failure.
- E. Train transitioning HF patients and caregivers in self-monitoring and record keeping (e.g., blood pressure, edema, heart rate, weight gain).

### II. Assessment (42 items)

- A. Assess to determine appropriate treatment plan.
- B. Evaluate risk of HF decompensation in patients with cerebrovascular and peripheral vascular disease.
- C. Evaluate risk of HF decompensation in patients with acute coronary syndrome and valve disease.
- D. Evaluate risk of HF decompensation in patients with elevated BP.
- E. Evaluate risk of HF decompensation in patients with CAD.
- F. Evaluate risk of HF decompensation in patients with atrial fibrillation.
- G. Determine needs for HF treatment interventions (e.g., diagnostic tests, medications, palliative, preventive, surgical).
- H. Determine differential diagnoses by prioritizing/recognizing urgent and emergent conditions.
- I. Determine differential diagnoses by synthesizing and analyzing subjective/objective information.
- J. Determine nutritional causes of cardiomyopathy leading to HF (e.g., sodium and fluid balance, thiamine deficiency from chronic alcoholism).
- K. Determine criteria for hospital discharge of acute HF decompensation patients.
- L. Evaluate candidacy for cardiac rehabilitation.
- M. Evaluate candidacy for referral to advanced care center.
- N. Establish final diagnoses by ordering, performing, or interpreting additional diagnostic tests.
- O. Establish final diagnoses by performing or interpreting additional physical examinations.
- P. Identify relevant changes in clinical status.
- Q. Identify contraindicated drugs based on patient specific parameters.



- R. Identify lab-based diagnostic tests for diagnosis and identification of disease stage of HF.
- S. Interpret multivariable risk scores (e.g., ADHERE, Seattle).
- T. Obtain comprehensive HF patient history that includes symptoms, social history, family history, past medical history, medications, allergies.
- U. Review and apply the results of cardiac catheterization.
- V. Review and apply the results of cardiac imaging (CT, MRI, PET).
- W. Review and apply the results of cardiac stress test.
- X. Review and apply the results of echocardiography.
- Y. Review and apply the results of Holter monitor.
- Z. Review and apply the results of laboratory test.
- AA. Review and apply the results of X-ray.
- BB. Perform a comprehensive physical examination.
- CC. Prescribe lab-based diagnostic tests for diagnosis and identification of disease stage.
- DD. Provide medication reconciliation.
- EE. Review discharge follow-up for errors or discrepancies in medications.
- FF. Review prescription history for adverse reactions (recognize and report).
- GG. Review prescription history for allergic reactions.
- HH. Review prescription history for avoidance of drug interactions and complications.

### III. Management (54 items)

- A. Advise patient and/or caregiver on guideline directed medical therapy and self-care plan.
- B. Demonstrate knowledge of social determinants and barriers to implementation of appropriate HF management.
- C. Assess patient eligibility for advanced therapies.
- D. Assess patient eligibility for hospice care coordination.
- E. Assess patient eligibility for recognition of futility in care.
- F. Participate in shared decision-making and advanced directives.
- G. Coordinate patient, caregiver, and/or surrogate to implement discharge plan.
- H. Coordinate palliative care for HF patients (e.g., counseling, cultural activities, homecare, medication to reduce pain/suffering, patient education, spiritual activities).
- I. Determine the effectiveness of the plan of treatment and care based on outcomes by assessing patient response(s).
- J. Determine the effectiveness of the plan of treatment and care based on outcomes by collecting additional subjective and/or objective information as needed.
- K. Recognize the importance of health-related quality of life (HRQOL) in patients with HF (e.g., cognitive dysfunction, chronic alcoholism, depression, symptom burden, functional status).
- L. Establish a patient-centered treatment and care plan that includes considering comorbidities.
- M. Establish a patient-centered treatment and care plan that includes making referrals to other health professionals and community resources.
- N. Establish a patient-centered treatment and care plan that includes ordering, performing, supervising, or interpreting results of further tests.
- O. Establish a patient-centered treatment and care plan that includes prescribing, ordering, or administering non-pharmacologic therapies and/or procedures.

- P. Establish a patient-centered treatment and care plan that includes prescribing, ordering, or administering pharmacological therapies.
- Q. Establish a patient-centered treatment and care plan that includes providing for appropriate follow-up.
- R. Establish a patient-centered treatment and care plan that includes providing relevant education and/or counseling.
- S. Evaluate the mechanisms of action, pharmacologic features, and dosing of existing and new agents for treating and managing HF.
- T. Identify drug-drug and drug-disease interactions.
- U. Recognize appropriate use criteria of specialized procedures specific to a given population(s) (e.g., endomyocardial biopsy, CPX).
- V. Provide education and or counseling for HF patients (e.g., diet/fluid intake, self-management, self-monitoring, weight).
- W. Utilize in-patient physical and occupational therapy for HF.

#### IV. Systems of Healthcare (10 items)

- A. Demonstrate knowledge of quality, safety, performance, value measures, and ethics in HF.
- B. Apply culturally sensitive methods with transitioning HF patients.
- C. Comply with Core Measures and best practice standards.
- D. Develop administrative roles, policies, and protocols for HF treatment and diagnosis.
- E. Participate in the development of formal and informal educational programs for appropriate health care professionals.

#### SAMPLE QUESTION

All examination questions are single select, multiple-choice with four options.

1. The **PRIMARY** goal of therapy in patients with chronic heart failure and atrial fibrillation is
  - A. prevention of thromboembolism and symptom control.
  - B. immediate restoration of sinus rhythm.
  - C. to control heart rate to a minimum of 70 beats per minute.
  - D. to prevent worsening heart failure.

Answer: A

#### TAKING THE EXAMINATION

##### TESTING SITES

The HF-Cert examination is a multiple-choice examination delivered via computer-based administration at vendor-selected testing centers across the United States. Testing sites have been selected to provide accessibility to the most candidates in the most controlled, secure and consistent environments possible. Visit <https://www.smttest.com/sitesavail/Default.aspx> to search test center locations.

All examination sites meet the following criteria:

- Test Center must conform with local building, sanitation & health codes.
- Test Center must be ADA compliant.
- Building and grounds must be clean and in good condition.
- Exits must be clearly marked and unobstructed.
- Fire extinguishers are required and must be in working order, location well marked and easily accessible.
- Emergency exits must be clearly identified and clear of obstructions.
- First-Aid kits must be stocked and easily accessible.
- Restrooms must be located in the same building as the testing center.
- Restrooms must be clean, supplied with necessary items, and in working order.
- Adequate parking must be available near the testing center location.
- All testing rooms meet the following criteria:
  - Temperature must be consistent and comfortable.
  - Test room must be well-ventilated, with continuous air circulation.
  - Test room must be lit so that each candidate can read all diagrams, charts, etc., and read the computer screen with no glare.

#### TEST CENTER ADMINISTRATOR/PROCTOR

All exam administrations are monitored by qualified proctors who are trained by HFSA's testing vendor. Test Center Administrators are accountable for checking candidate identification, seating candidates, security of test materials, proctoring, and dealing with candidate misconduct.

#### IDENTIFICATION

Candidates are required to present one form of original (no photocopies or digital IDs), valid (unexpired), government issued, photo identification to gain admission to the testing site. Acceptable forms of primary identification (both photograph and signature required) include:

- Driver's license
- Passport
- Alien registration card
- National/state/country identification card
- Military identification card

The name and photo on the identification presented must match the examinee.

If a candidate legally changes their name after submitting the application and before testing, the candidate must contact the HFSA certification department and Prometric and provide both entities with the legal document confirming the name change (i.e., Marriage License, Divorce Decree, Naturalization Certificate).

Candidates will not be admitted to the testing site without proper identification, and all fees will be forfeit (see Rescheduling, Cancellations, No Shows, and Refunds).

## TEST SITE SECURITY

To provide a fair and consistent environment for all candidates, the exams are delivered using standardized procedures following strict security protocols. Candidates are required to follow all testing site rules at all times. Failure to follow these rules may result in termination of a candidate's testing session, invalidation of the candidate's exam score, and/or disciplinary action.

The following rules will be enforced on exam day:

- Candidates must arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the scheduled start of the exam. Late arrivals may not be accommodated. Fees are not refunded for missed examination appointments.
- Candidates must present acceptable identification. Please see the "Identification" section above.
- No study materials, documents, or notes of any sort are to be taken into the examination area. No materials may be removed from the examination area.
- Candidates are observed at all times during testing and should be aware that security procedures are in place and will be enforced.
- Candidates may not bring any electronic devices, notes, or reading material into the examination area. Cell phones, backpacks, purses and other personal items are not permitted. Candidates are encouraged to leave these items at home when possible. Items brought to the test center will be placed in a secure area that is not accessible to the candidate during the examination session.
- No questions concerning the content of the examination may be asked in the examination area before, during, or after the examination. Proctors are not qualified, nor are they permitted, to answer any questions about the content of the examination. Proctors may answer questions about processes (e.g., time limit) but cannot interpret or explain any information on the HF-Cert exam.
- All candidates are expected to answer the exam questions independently. There is to be no sharing of information, teamwork, or any other collaborative relationship with another candidate during the exam. Any violation of this policy is misconduct/cheating. Any candidate engaged in this behavior may be subject to score cancellation and not be allowed to sit for future administrations of the exam. See the disciplinary policy for additional information.
- No exam questions are to be discussed during or after the exam administration. Any infraction of these terms is a violation of your ethical responsibilities and subject to the disciplinary policy. It is also a violation of copyright law and examination security.
- Candidates should dress comfortably. While all test sites strive to ensure the exam is given in a room that is neither too hot nor too cold, candidates should be prepared with appropriate layered attire.
- No food or beverage is permitted in the examination area.
- Candidates may not communicate with anyone except the proctor during the exam.
- Candidates are not permitted to bring guests, including children, to the testing center.
- Candidates should complete their exams quietly, without disturbing others.

## CANDIDATE FEEDBACK

Exam candidates may provide feedback at the testing center through a post-exam candidate survey or by contacting [hf-cert@hfsa.org](mailto:hf-cert@hfsa.org). Feedback received from candidates will be reviewed by the HFSA as part of the overall examination review and quality assurance process for the program.

Candidates will not receive direct feedback regarding specific item decisions.

## CANDIDATE MISCONDUCT

Individuals suspected of cheating will be subject to HFSA’s disciplinary policies and procedures.

Any incidents of suspected cheating, violation of any HFSA policies, disturbances, attempts to remove test materials or notes from the testing room, or other exam-related irregularities will be reported immediately to HFSA by the testing vendor. All serious incidents will be investigated by HFSA with assistance from the testing vendor. Testing irregularities may result in termination of a candidate’s participation in the examination administration, invalidation of exam scores, or other disciplinary action.

HFSA and the testing vendor reserve the right to investigate any incident of suspected misconduct or irregularity.

## COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

All proprietary rights to the HF-Cert examination, including copyright, are held by the HFSA. To protect the validity of the scores reported, candidates must adhere to strict guidelines regarding proper conduct in handling these copyrighted proprietary materials. The law strictly prohibits any attempt to reproduce all or part of the HF-Cert examination. Such attempts may include, but are not limited to, removing materials from the testing room, aiding others by any means in reconstructing any portion of the exam, posting content on any discussion forum or website, and selling, distributing, receiving, or having unauthorized possession of any portion of the exam. Alleged copyright violations will be investigated and, if warranted, prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. It should be noted that examination scores might become invalid in the event of this type of suspected breach. Permanent revocation of certification may occur if allegations are substantiated. See the HFSA disciplinary policy for further information.

## TESTING IRREGULARITIES

The continued security of the certification exam is an essential component of all phases of the exam development, maintenance, and administration process. Any possible/suspected security violations will be reported promptly to the Certification Council for investigation and/or correction as needed.

Irregularities observed during the testing period, including but not limited to creating a disturbance, giving or receiving unauthorized information or aid to or from other persons, or attempting to remove test materials or notes from the testing room, may be sufficient cause to terminate candidate participation in the examination administration or to invalidate scores. Irregularities may also be evidenced by subsequent statistical analysis of testing materials.

## AFTER THE EXAMINATION

### NOTIFICATION OF EXAM RESULTS

Score reports will be presented to candidates at the testing site immediately following the exam administration.

Passing score reports include a decision outcome (“pass”), information about official notification of certification (e.g., certificate), percent correct by domain, and recertification requirements.

Failing score reports include a decision outcome (“fail”), the candidate total score, the passing score, the type of score reported (e.g., raw), percent correct by domain, appropriate uses and potential misuses of reported score information and reexamination information.

Examination results are not discussed or given out by HFSA staff via email, telephone or fax.

Certificates and digital badges are provided to HF-Cert certificants approximately 30 days after the testing window closes or after determination of the passing score, whichever comes last.

## UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCORES

A criterion-referenced standard setting process is used to establish the passing point for the exam. This means that each candidate's performance on the exam is measured against a predetermined standard. Candidates are not graded on a curve and do not compete against each other or against a quota.

The HF-Cert examination indicates whether a candidate is minimally competent to practice as a heart failure provider. Scores are reported to failing candidates as raw scores. Each item is worth one point, so the sum of correct responses is a raw score. A candidate's total score relative to the cut score determines whether he/she has passed or failed the examination. To determine the cut score, a group of heart failure providers defines the minimum acceptable performance level, which is linked to a final examination score.

Failing candidates are provided with the percent correct in each of the four content domains. Passing candidates are provided with this information to assist in future professional development selection. Failing candidates are provided with this information as a guideline to assist in future exam preparation efforts and cautioned that domain-level reliability varies due to the number of items included in each domain and the overall score is the best indicator of performance ability, therefore reviewing all domain areas is suggested.

## VALIDATION OF SCORES

HFSA and Prometric reserve the right to cancel scores if their validity and integrity is compromised. Discrepancies such as misconduct of a candidate may cause a score to be suspect. HFSA and Prometric will investigate the occurrence and may cancel or withhold the examination results if a violation of regulations is found.

## VERIFICATION OF EXAM RESULTS

Because of the sophistication of computerized online scoring and the extensive quality-control procedures involved, errors in scoring are virtually nonexistent. When reviews of scores occur, historically less than .1% of the examination scores are found to be in error.

Due to the secure nature of the examination, neither HFSA nor Prometric will disclose examination questions or a candidate's response to individual questions. Examinees who question or dispute their test score can request to have their score verified, in writing, to HFSA no later than 7 days after receipt of the exam score report. Prometric verifies scoring by calculating the number of questions the examinee answered correctly at the test site and confirming that the number matches what was reported on the score report.

Candidates who request Prometric to verify their scores will incur a fee of \$50.00 USD (non-refundable).

## RE-EXAMINATION

Candidates who fail the examination may retest at any Prometric testing site during their one-year eligibility window which begins with the date of application approval. A retest fee must be submitted for the subsequent examination attempt. Candidates should log into the scheduling portal to schedule the retest appointment and pay the retesting fee.

Candidates may not retest within the same testing window as the previous exam attempt. The rationale for this waiting period includes:

- Ensuring candidates have adequate time to prepare for the examination;
- Ensuring the security of the exam administration process; and
- Protecting the integrity of the assessment by limiting candidate exposure to items.

Should a candidate fail to pass the exam during the one-year eligibility period, a full application and initial application fee must be submitted to retest.

## EXAM APPEALS

Candidates who fail the exam and believe irregular testing conditions were a contributing factor may file an appeal to the HFSA Certification Council. Examples of irregular testing conditions include a medical or personal emergency during the testing session, exam vendor technical issues such as computer malfunctions or power outages, and other significant test site disruptions. All appeal requests must be made in writing and postmarked or emailed no later than 7 days after the receipt of the exam score report. All appeals must describe the suspected error or problem and the requested remedy. The Council will review the information and make a final decision within 30 days of receipt. The decision of the Council shall be final.

Because of the secure nature of these examinations, HFSA will not disclose examination questions prior to, or after, the administration. Candidate responses to test questions (correct or not correct) will not be discussed or disclosed.

## MAINTAINING YOUR CERTIFICATION

### PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

HFSA supports the ongoing professional development of its certificants. The mandatory recertification process provides certificants with the opportunity to demonstrate continued competency, demonstrate the reinforcement and expansion of their knowledge and skills, and retain their knowledge of current practice.

The HFSA Certification Council requires periodic recertification to promote professional development for heart failure providers to ensure that individuals who hold the HF-Cert credential maintain an ongoing commitment to learning in their area(s) of practice to strengthen their knowledge and skills.

Recertification also provides encouragement to, and acknowledgement for, participation in ongoing professional development activities. To support this purpose, the recertification requirements reflect continuing competence and education, activities that enhance ongoing professional development, and opportunities that encourage new learning.

The five-year period established for recertification is based on both the scope of issues that face heart failure providers and the HFSA's acknowledgement that new practices, research, and information are introduced in the field with enough frequency that professional development activities should be conducted routinely so that certificants remain up to date with both current best practices and emerging knowledge.

## RECERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS

Certification is valid for a five-year period, and the certification expiration date is indicated on the individual's certificate. Recertification applications and fees are due 45 days prior to the expiration of the HF-Cert certification. This 45-day window affords HFSA and certificants time to review and address potential recertification application inquiries such as non-qualifying continuing education activities.

Certificants will receive a courtesy recertification reminder to the email on file; however, it is the responsibility of the certificant to submit a timely recertification application and retain appropriate documentation of their continuing education activities.

To maintain active HF-Cert certification status all certificants must complete the online HF-Cert Recertification Application with all required documentation and fees by the published deadline to document compliance with the recertification requirements. *(Please note: the HF-Cert recertification application will be live at a later date. HF-Cert credential holders will receive notification when the application is available to them.)*

Candidates must document compliance with the following recertification requirements:

**License:** Continually maintain a current, active registered nurse, pharmacist, physician, or physician assistant license in good standing in the US. Any lapse in licensure must be reported to HFSA within 15 days. Failure to report changes in licensure status will be investigated under the Disciplinary Policy.

### **Recertify by Continuing Education or by Exam**

**Recertify by Continuing Education:** Accrue 100 continuing education (CE) credits during the five-year reporting cycle. Certificants may earn CE in any of the categories below.

#### **a) Heart Failure**

- A minimum of 50% (50 CEs) of continuing education must be earned in the heart failure category. Content must be relevant to heart failure (e.g., HF-Cert examination content outline).

#### **b) Disease States**

- Continuing education may also be earned in the disease states category. Content must be related to disease states or therapies that impact the care of heart failure patients. Examples include but are not limited to:
  - Autoimmune Thyroid
  - Cancer
  - Cardiovascular Disease States
  - Diabetes Mellitus
  - Sleep Apnea

One hour of continuing education is equal to one (1) CE credit. Clinical or non-clinical CEs are acceptable. All content must be accredited by an appropriate authorizing entity (e.g., ACCME, ACPE, ANCC) or approved by HFSA.

**Recertify by Examination:** Recertify by examination and take the exam before the five-year certification cycle ends. Certificants who wish to recertify by retaking the HF-Cert examination must do so in the final year that they are due to recertify (year five). Certificants must achieve a passing score on the HF-Cert



examination. Certificants recertifying by exam are subject to the Certification Council re-examination policy. If a certificant elects to recertify through examination, the option to recertify by continuing education is forfeited.

**Background, Code of Ethics, Application Accuracy Attestation:** Applicants must attest to comply with the HFSA Code of Ethics and report any State Board suspensions. Any State Board suspension must be reported to HFSA within 15 days. Applicants and certificants must abide to practice heart failure specialty in a manner consist with the certification standards and responsibilities set forth in the HFSA’s Code of Ethics. Applicants must attest to the accuracy of information reported within the recertification application.

Recertification requirements will be published on the website and easily accessible to applicants and certificants.

## RECERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS RATIONALE

**Licensure:** The requirement for a current, active registered nurse, pharmacist, physician, or physician assistant license in good standing is consistent with the state requirements to practice as a registered nurse, pharmacist, physician, or physician assistant in the US. Requiring that the license is full, current and unrestricted is necessary to demonstrate that the registered nurse, pharmacist, physician, or physician assistant has no unresolved disciplinary issues as a measure to increase public protection.

### **Recertify by Continuing Education or by Exam**

**Recertify by Continuing Education:** The 100 credits of continuing education requirement ensures that applicants have education that is specific to heart failure prevention, assessment, management, and healthcare systems and/or pertinent to disease states or therapies that impact the care of heart failure patients. The minimum CE requirement (50%) in the heart category guarantees coverage of HF exam content but also allows practitioners such as hospitalists or intensivists the opportunity to earn CE relevant to HF such as disease states or therapies that impact the care of heart failure patients. The requirement that CE be completed within the five-year recertification period provides assurance that the registered nurse’s, pharmacist’s, physician’s, or physician assistant’s advanced-level knowledge is up to date. Credit hours may not be carried over from one 5-year period to the next. The required hours are aligned with the 2019 job analysis, a study conducted by the HFSA, continuing education requirements and license renewal, and a competitive review of other relevant certifications.

**Recertify by Examination:** Certificants are required to pass the HF-Cert examination to demonstrate their continued competence, knowledge and reinforce essential skills as a registered nurse, pharmacist, physician, or physician assistant required to provide safe and competent evidence-based heart failure services as determined by the job analysis study and represented on the examination content outline.

**Background, Code of Ethics, and Application Accuracy Attestation:** HFSA certificants have the obligation to: maintain and demonstrate high standards of integrity and professional conduct; accept responsibility for their actions; continually seek to enhance their professional capabilities; practice with fairness and honesty; and encourage others to act in a professional manner. The requirement for adherence to the Code of Ethics provides increased awareness of expected ethical behaviors as well as increased public protection through a process that provides a reporting and investigation mechanism for Code of Ethics violations including State Board suspensions.

## ACCEPTABLE CONTINUING EDUCATION

All continuing education must be relevant to heart failure and accredited by an appropriate authorizing entity (e.g., ACCME, ACPE, ANCC, accredited) or approved by HFSA.

## RECERTIFICATION APPLICATION VERIFICATION

In order to maintain the credibility and integrity of the certification process, HFSA reserves the right to verify any information provided on recertification applications. Requests for verification of recertification requirements may be made prior to the application due date for the recertification cycle. Only complete recertification applications will be accepted. Incomplete applications will be returned to the certificant who may address the deficiencies and resubmit the application for review, adhering to established application deadlines.

HFSA will review all recertification applications for adherence to the recertification requirement.

Verification of each recertification requirement will be conducted by certification staff as follows:

**Licensure:** Certificant will provide current license number, expiration date, and state of license on the application. License will be verified with the relevant board.

**Continuing Education (if applicable):** All continuing education hours must meet the criteria outlined in the recertification requirements. Certificants will list courses and course descriptions, dates & hours online via the secure application platform and include copies of certificates of attendance (or equivalent) or attest to the accuracy of the information submitted and be subject to requests for additional information/documentation. All continuing education will be reviewed to ensure the correct number and types of credits are reported, credits were earned within the previous five (5) years from the submission date, topics align with heart failure, disease states or therapies that impact the care of heart failure patients, the HF-Cert exam content outline, and supporting documentation is submitted. Credit hours may not be carried over from one 5-year period to the next.

**Examination (if applicable):** HFSA certification staff will verify the passing score on the HF-Cert examination.

**Background, Code of Ethics, and Application Accuracy Attestation:** Certificants will attest on the recertification application, and system rules will require completion of the attestation before submission.

If any areas of non-compliance are identified during the verification and review process, the individual will have 30 days to submit any required information. If the required information is not provided the individual's certification will expire at the end of the 30 days or on the normal expiration date (whichever comes last).

## RECERTIFICATION ACCEPTANCE

HFSA will issue a renewal notice to the certificant once all recertification requirements have been met. New certificates will be granted to HF-Cert certificants the month after the certification expiration date.

Recertification applications will not be accepted from individuals whose certification is in a state of suspension, has lapsed or has been revoked.

All continuing education activities are subject to review and approval by HFSA. Credit is only granted after the activity has been completed and documented.

## FAILURE TO RECERTIFY

Recertification is mandatory for all certificants. If certification is not renewed it will expire on the last day of the month five years after the certification was last earned. Individuals whose certification has expired, been suspended, or been revoked may not represent him/herself as an HFSA certificant and may not use the credential until he/she receives official notice that the recertification requirements have been satisfied or that certification status has been reinstated.

Certificants who fail to recertify in accordance with HFSA policy will receive an official notification. Notifications address the expiration of the HF-Cert certification, removal from the HFSA online registry for verification, and policies and procedures for reinstatement.

## REINSTATEMENT

If certification has been expired for 90 days or less, an individual may reinstate his/her certification by meeting all of the recertification requirements, submitting a complete recertification application, and paying the additional reinstatement fee. If the application is approved, the individual's expiration date for the reinstated credential will be the same as if the certification had been renewed on time.

Certificants who meet the eligibility requirements of the reinstatement policy shall be added to the HFSA online verification registry.

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## LAPSED CERTIFICATION

If certification has been expired for 90 days or more, the certification is lapsed. Individuals who want to earn the HF-Cert credential from a lapsed status must complete and submit a certification application, remit the application fee, meet all published eligibility requirements in effect at the time of reapplication, and pass the HF-Cert examination.

Certificants who fail to meet the eligibility requirements of the recertification or reinstatement policy may not use the HF-Cert designation. Certificants who fail to meet the eligibility requirements of the recertification or reinstatement policy shall be listed as lapsed in the HFSA online verification registry.

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## RECERTIFICATION APPEAL

Individuals who are notified that they do not meet the recertification requirements may appeal this decision by sending a written notice of the appeal to the HFSA Practice and Patient Programs Department staff within 30 days of receipt of the adverse recertification decision. The Practice and Patient Programs Department staff will forward the notice to the Certification Council for review.

The Council will review the information and will make a final decision regarding eligibility. No new or additional information may be submitted with the appeal request. The recertification appeal will be reviewed within 45 days of receipt. Written notice of the final decision will be sent to the applicant within 30 days of the review.

The HFSA Certification Council may appoint a subgroup or appeal review task force for the purpose of reviewing recertification appeals and making final determinations.

## CODE OF ETHICS

### INTRODUCTION

The HFSA Code of Ethics (Code) applies to all individuals holding the HF-Cert certification (certificants) and all individuals seeking HF-Cert certification from HFSA (candidates or applicants).

All applicants and certificants agree to the Code as a condition of certification. Violation of any portion of the Code may result in disciplinary action as outlined in the Disciplinary Policy.

## PURPOSE

The Code of Ethics establishes the basic ethical standards for the professional behavior of HFSA certificants and candidates. The Code is designed to provide both appropriate ethical practice guidelines and enforceable standards of conduct for all certificants and candidates.

## CODE OF ETHICS

The HFSA supports appropriate, professional standards designed to serve the public. HFSA certificants and candidates for certification provide heart failure in a manner that promotes integrity and reflects positively on the profession, consistent with accepted moral, ethical, and legal standards.

Certificants and candidates have the obligations practice heart failure services in a manner consistent with the certification standards and responsibilities set forth below. This includes the obligations to maintain and demonstrate high standards of integrity and professional conduct; accept responsibility for their actions; continually seek to enhance their professional capabilities; practice with fairness and honesty; and encourage others to act in a professional manner.

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### SECTION 1: ADHERENCE TO LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

- Adhere to all laws, regulations, policies, and ethical standards that apply to the practice of heart failure.
- Refrain from public behavior that is clearly in violation of professional, ethical, and/or legal standards that apply to the practice of providing heart failure services.
- Refrain from discrimination in professional activities, including relationships with employees, employers, patients, customers and their families, and other professionals.

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### SECTION 2: ADHERENCE TO HFSA POLICIES & REQUIREMENTS

- Follow all HFSA policies, procedures, requirements, and rules. This includes the obligation to be aware of and understand these policies and requirements.
- Provide accurate and complete information to HFSA concerning certification and recertification.
- Keep confidential all examination information, including preventing unauthorized disclosures of exam information. No part of the examination may be copied, recorded, reproduced, shared, removed from the examination site or otherwise compromised in any manner.
- Cooperate with HFSA regarding matters related to the Code of Ethics including complaint and/or disciplinary investigations.
- Adhere to HFSA policies regarding the use and display of credentials awarded by the HFSA.

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### SECTION 3: SERVICE TO PATIENTS

- Promote the interest and safety of patients in all aspects of practice, including industry interactions.
- Treat patients with fairness and respect.
- Work within the multidisciplinary healthcare team to ensure optimal heart failure care outcomes to improve patients' quality of life.

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### SECTION 4: PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE

- Act honestly in the conduct of responsibilities and in all professional interactions with others.
- Deliver competent heart failure services.
- Be accountable and responsible for his/her actions and behaviors.
- Recognize the limitations of one's professional ability (based on education, knowledge, skills, and experience) and provide services only when qualified to do so.
- Maintain the confidentiality of private and sensitive information unless there is a legal obligation to disclose the information.
- Properly use all professional licenses, titles, degrees and all credentials and provide accurate and truthful information regarding education, experience, qualifications, and the performance of services.
- Disclose any conflicts of interest or potential conflicts of interest and avoid conduct that could cause a conflict of interest.
- Adhere to the guidelines established by your regulatory body and employer regarding soliciting or accepting industry gifts.
- Participate in industry-associated research only when that research meets accepted ethical, regulatory, and scientific standards.
- Contribute professionally as an author only in healthcare related publications that meet accepted ethical, regulatory, and scientific standards.
- Provide educational programs and materials with a fair and balanced presentation that meet guidelines as established by recognized accrediting bodies, are peer reviewed, and/or meet regulatory requirements.
- Uphold high standards of professional behavior at all times in the heart failure provider role.

## MISCELLANEOUS POLICIES

### STATEMENT OF FAIRNESS AND NONDISCRIMINATION

HFSA adheres to principles of fairness and due process and endorses the principles of equal opportunity. In administering the certification program, HFSA does not discriminate or deny opportunity to anyone on the basis of race, color, creed, age, gender, national origin, religion, disability, marital status, parental status, ancestry, sexual orientation, military discharge status, source of income, or any other status protected by applicable law. All candidates for certification will be judged solely on the published eligibility and recertification criteria determined by the HFSA Certification Council.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

The HFSA is committed to protecting confidential and/or proprietary information related to applicants; candidates; certificants; and the examination development, maintenance, and administration process. The confidentiality policy applies to all HFSA certification employees, Council members, task force members, subject matter experts, consultants, and other individuals who are permitted access to such confidential information. These individuals are required to sign confidentiality forms/attestations.

Confidential materials include but are not limited to an individual's application status, personal applicant/certificant information, exam development documentation (including job analysis study reports, technical reports, and cut score studies), exam items and answers, exam forms, item banks, and individual exam scores.

The HFSA will not disclose confidential personal information unless authorized in writing by the individual or as required by law.

Information about an individual will only be released to that individual unless release of the information is authorized in writing by the individual or is required by law. Personal information submitted by individuals with an initial or recertification application is considered confidential. Personal information retained within the certification database will be kept confidential. Exam scores will be released only to the individual candidate.

All application information is confidential and shall not be shared with any party other than HFSA's examination development or administration vendors for purposes of conducting certification activities.

Aggregate examination statistics, studies and reports concerning individuals will contain no information identifiable with any individuals, unless authorized in writing by the individual.

#### CHANGES IN CONTACT INFORMATION

Candidates and certificants are responsible for maintaining their mailing and email addresses in the online application portal. HFSA may send certification materials to the mailing address and/or email addresses on file. Candidates and certificants may log in to the online portal at any time or contact [hf-cert@hfsa.org](mailto:hf-cert@hfsa.org) to update contact information.

#### RECORDS RETENTION

All documents are retained according to the Certification Council's document management policy. Confidential documents that are no longer required to be retained are securely destroyed. Individual examination results and active applicant, candidate, and certificant data are permanently retained as are records of disciplinary actions and investigations. Inactive certificant records are retained for seven years after the file becomes inactive.

#### STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH ALL LAWS

HFSA is committed to compliance with all applicable federal, state/provincial, and local laws and regulations including, but not limited to confidentiality, nondiscrimination, employment, business, privacy, maintenance of records, and disabilities.

Reports of unlawful activity will be referred to appropriate law enforcement and/or licensing officials.

#### CERTIFICATION VERIFICATION

The names of HFSA-certified individuals and their certification status are not considered confidential and are published by HFSA for public verification purposes. Online verification of certification status will include the name of the certificant, current certification status, credential held, and state. Verification will be accessible via the certification program's web page on the HFSA website or by contacting the HFSA office.

Certificants may opt-out of inclusion in the online verification system by contacting the HFSA office via email. When certificants choose to opt-out of online verification, written verification of credentialed status may be

obtained by providing the certificant name via email to the HFSA certification staff. Only the certification status may be shared. No other data may be shared without written permission from the credentialed practitioner.

Application status, information about whether an individual has taken the examination, and score information will not be released to those requesting verification and are treated as required by the Confidentiality Policy.

## DESIGNATION & CERTIFICATE

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### USE OF THE CERTIFICATION MARK

After receiving official notification of HF-Cert certification, the credential may be used only as long as certification remains valid and in good standing. Individuals may not use the HF-Cert, or any other credential awarded by HFSA, until they have received specific written notification that they have successfully completed all requirements, including passing the examination and documenting the specified experience.

Certificants must comply with all recertification requirements to maintain use of the credential.

Certification is a non-transferable, revocable, limited, non-exclusive license to use the certification designation “HF-Cert”, subject to compliance with the policies and procedures, as may be revised from time to time.

Except as permitted by this policy, any use or display of HFSA certification marks and/or logos without the prior written permission of the HFSA is prohibited. Any candidate or certificant who manufacturers, modifies, reproduces, distributes, or uses a fraudulent or otherwise unauthorized HFSA certificate, HFSA designation or other credential may be subject to disciplinary action, including denial or revocation of eligibility or certification. Any individual who engages in such behavior also may be subject to legal action.

Education and training providers may not use the HFSA name, logos, or certification marks to state or imply any approval or endorsement by the HFSA Certification Council or any affiliation with HFSA.

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### PROPER USE OF THE CREDENTIAL

After meeting all eligibility requirements and passing the examination, individuals may use their credential in all correspondence and professional relations and on promotional materials, such as stationery, websites, business cards, etc. The mark or logo may be used only on business cards, stationery, letterhead, and similar documents on which the name of the individual certified is prominently displayed.

Individuals who have met the certification standards established by the HFSA Certification Council are authorized to use the following certification mark in communications and marketing materials:

- The credential may be used as HF-Cert.
- The credential is typically used after the certificants name following academic degrees and licensure (e.g., John Smith, PharmD, MBA, HF-Cert).
- The mark must be clearly associated with the individual(s) certified by the HFSA.

#### **Correct Use:**

- John Doe, HF-Cert certificant

#### **Misuse:**

- The ACME company employs three HF-Cert professionals.

The certification mark(s) may be used only as long as certification is valid. Should the certification be suspended or withdrawn for any reason, the individual must immediately cease the use of the certification designation and acronym on stationery, websites, business cards, and all promotional materials.

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## OWNERSHIP OF THE MARK AND LOGO

The certification marks and logo are the property of the HFSA. Permission to use the certification mark or logo is granted to credentialed persons at the discretion of the HFSA Certification Council, for permissible uses only.

The HF-Cert marks and logo may not be revised or altered in any way. They must be displayed in the same form as produced by HFSA and cannot be reproduced unless such reproduction is identical to the mark provided by HFSA.

The mark or logo may not be used in any manner which could bring HFSA into disrepute or in any way is considered misleading or unauthorized. This includes any use of the mark or logo that the public might construe as an endorsement, approval or sponsorship by HFSA of a certificant's business or any product thereof.

## CERTIFICATES AND DIGITAL BADGES

Candidates who earn the HF-Cert credential will receive a non-transferable certificate specifying that the HF-Cert designation has been awarded. Certificants will receive a certificate that includes their name, credential awarded, and expiration date. The certificate may only be displayed during the period for which the credential is valid. Certificates remain the property of HFSA and must be returned to HFSA upon request (e.g., revocation of certification). Digital badges will automatically expire if the credential expires and is not renewed. Certificates may be granted in hard copy or via secure digital badge.

## COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

### DISCIPLINARY AND APPEALS POLICY

To maintain and enhance the credibility of the HFSA certification program the Certification Council has adopted the following procedures to allow individuals to bring complaints concerning the conduct of individuals who are candidates or certificants of the HFSA.

In the event an individual candidate or certificant violates the HFSA Code of Ethics, certification rules, or HFSA policies, the HFSA Certification Council may reprimand or suspend the individual or may revoke certification.

The grounds for sanctions under these procedures may include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Violation of the HFSA Code of Ethics.
- Violation of established HFSA policies, rules and requirements.
- Conviction of a felony or other crime of moral turpitude under federal or state/provincial law in a matter related to the practice of, or qualifications for heart failure providers.
- Failure to maintain professional licensure
- Gross negligence, willful misconduct, or other unethical conduct in the performance of services for which the individual has achieved certification from HFSA.
- Fraud or misrepresentation in an initial application or renewal application for certification.



Information regarding the complaint process will be available to the public via the HFSA website or other published documents. A complete copy of this policy will be publicly available.

Actions taken under this policy do not constitute enforcement of the law, although referral to appropriate federal, state/provincial, or local government agencies may be made about the conduct of the candidate or certificant in appropriate situations. Individuals initially bringing complaints are not entitled to any relief or damages by virtue of this process, although they will receive notice of the actions taken.

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## COMPLAINTS

Complaints may be submitted by any individual or entity. Complaints should be reported to HFSA in writing and should include the name of the person submitting the complaint, the name of the person the complaint is regarding along with other relevant identifying information, a detailed description of factual allegations supporting the charges, and any relevant supporting documentation. Information submitted during the complaint and investigation process is considered confidential and will be handled in accordance with the Council's Confidentiality policy. Inquiries or submissions other than complaints may be reviewed and handled by the HFSA or its staff members at its discretion.

Upon receipt and preliminary review of a complaint involving the certification program the HFSA Practice and Patient Programs Department staff in consultation with the Chair of the Council may conclude, in their sole discretion, that the submission:

- Contains unreliable or insufficient information, or
- Is patently frivolous or inconsequential.

In such cases, the HFSA Practice and Patient Programs Department staff and Council Chair may determine that the submission does not constitute a valid and actionable complaint that would justify bringing it before the HFSA Certification Council for investigation and a determination of whether there has been a violation of substantive requirements of the certification process. If so, the submission is disposed of by notice from the Practice and Patient Programs Department staff and Council Chair to its submitter, if the submitter is identified. All such preliminary dispositions by the Council Chair are reported to the Certification Council at its next meeting. Preliminary review will be conducted within 30 calendar days of receipt of the complaint.

If a submission is deemed by the Chair to be a valid and actionable complaint, the Chair shall see that written notice is provided to the candidate/certificant whose conduct has been called into question. The candidate/certificant whose conduct is at issue shall also be given the opportunity to respond to the complaint. The Chair also shall ensure that the individual submitting the complaint receives notice that the complaint is being reviewed by the HFSA Certification Council.

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## COMPLAINT REVIEW

For each complaint that the Chair concludes is a valid and actionable complaint, the HFSA authorizes an investigation into its specific facts or circumstances to whatever extent is necessary to clarify, expand, or corroborate the information provided by the submitter.

The Chair appoints a Disciplinary Review Task Force of three or more individuals, who may or may not be members of the HFSA Certification Council to investigate and make an appropriate determination with respect to each such valid and actionable complaint; the Disciplinary Review Task Force may review one or more such complaints as

determined by the Chair. The Disciplinary Review Task Force initially determines whether it is appropriate to review the complaint under these Procedures or whether the matter should be referred to another entity engaged in the administration of law. The timeline for responses and for providing any additional information shall be established by the Disciplinary Review Task Force. The review and investigation will be completed in an appropriate amount of time, not to exceed 6 months, unless there are extenuating circumstances that require an extended time period. The Disciplinary Review Task Force may be assisted in the conduct of its investigation by other members of the Council or by HFSA staff or legal counsel. The Chair exercises general supervision over all investigations.

Both the individual submitting the complaint and the candidate/certificant who is the subject of the investigation (or his or her employer) may be contacted for additional information with respect to the complaint. The Disciplinary Review Task Force, or the HFSA Certification Council on its behalf, may at its discretion contact such other individuals who may have knowledge of the facts and circumstances surrounding the complaint.

All investigations and deliberations of the Disciplinary Review Task Force and the HFSA are conducted in confidence, with all written communications sealed and marked "Personal and Confidential," and they are conducted objectively, without any indication of prejudgment. An investigation may be directed toward any aspect of a complaint which is relevant or potentially relevant. Formal hearings are not held, and the parties are not expected to be represented by counsel, although the Disciplinary Review Task Force and HFSA may consult their own counsel.

Members of the Disciplinary Review Task Force shall be reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred in connection with the activities of the Task Force.

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#### DETERMINATION OF VIOLATION

Upon completion of an investigation, the Disciplinary Review Task Force recommends whether the Certification Council should make a determination that there has been a violation of its policies and rules. When the Disciplinary Review Task Force recommends that the Certification Council find a violation, the Disciplinary Review Task Force also recommends imposition of an appropriate sanction. If the Disciplinary Review Task Force so recommends, a proposed determination with a proposed sanction is prepared under the supervision of the Chair and is presented by a representative of the Disciplinary Review Task Force to the Council along with the record of the Disciplinary Review Task Force 's investigation.

If the Disciplinary Review Task Force recommends against a determination that a violation has occurred, the complaint is dismissed with notice to the candidate/certificant, the candidate's/certificant's employer, and the individual or entity who submitted the complaint.

The Certification Council reviews the recommendation of the Disciplinary Review Task Force based upon the record of the investigation. The Council may accept, reject, or modify the Disciplinary Review Task Force's recommendation, either with respect to the determination of a violation or the recommended sanction to be imposed. If the Council makes a determination that a violation has occurred, this determination and the imposition of a sanction are promulgated by written notice to the candidate/certificant, and to the individual submitting the complaint, if the submitter agrees in advance and in writing to maintain in confidence whatever portion of the information is not made public by the HFSA.

In certain circumstances, the Council may consider a recommendation from the Disciplinary Review Task Force that the candidate/certificant who has violated the certification program policies or rules should be offered an

opportunity to submit a written assurance that the conduct in question has been terminated and will not recur. The decision of the Disciplinary Review Task Force to make such a recommendation and of the Council to accept it are within their respective discretionary powers. If such an offer is extended, the candidate/certificant at issue must submit the required written assurance within thirty days of receipt of the offer, and the assurance must be submitted in terms that are acceptable to the Council. If the Council accepts the assurance, notice is given to the candidate/certificant's employer and to the submitter of the complaint, if the submitter agrees in advance and in writing to maintain the information in confidence.

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## SANCTIONS

Any of the following sanctions may be imposed by the Council upon a candidate/certificant whom the Council has determined to have violated the policies and rules of its certification program(s), although the sanction applied must reasonably relate to the nature and severity of the violation, focusing on reformation of the conduct of the member and deterrence of similar conduct by others:

- Written reprimand to the candidate/certificant;
- Suspension of the certificant for a designated period; or
- Suspension of the candidate's application eligibility for a designated period; or
- Termination of the certificant's certification from the HFSA; or
- Termination of the candidate's application eligibility for a designated period.

For sanctions that include suspension or termination, a summary of the final determination and the sanction with the candidate/certificant's name and date is published by the HFSA. This information will be published only after any appeal has either been considered or the appeal period has passed.

Reprimand in the form of a written notice from the Chair normally is sent to a candidate/certificant who has received his or her first substantiated complaint. Suspension normally is imposed on a candidate/certificant who has received two substantiated complaints. Termination normally is imposed on a candidate/certificant who has received two substantiated complaints within a two-year period, or three or more substantiated complaints. The HFSA Certification Council may at its discretion, however, impose any of the sanctions, if warranted, in specific cases.

Certificants who have been terminated shall have their certification revoked and may not be considered for HFSA certification in the future. If certification is revoked, all certificates or other materials requested by the HFSA must be returned promptly to the HFSA.

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## APPEAL

Within thirty (30) days from receipt of notice of a determination by the HFSA that a candidate/ certificant violated the certification program policies and/or rules, the affected candidate/certificant may submit to the HFSA in writing a request for an appeal.

Upon receipt of a request for appeal, the Chair of the HFSA establishes an appellate body consisting of at least three, but not more than five, individuals. This Appeal Task Force may review one or more appeals, upon request of the Chair. No current members of the Disciplinary Review Task Force or the HFSA Certification Council may serve on the Appeal Task Force; further, no one with any personal involvement or conflict of interest may serve on the

Appeal Task Force. Members of the Appeal Task Force may be reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred in connection with the activities of the Appeal Task Force.

The Appeal Task Force may only review whether the determination by the HFSA Certification Council of a violation of the certification program policies and/or rules was inappropriate because of:

- material errors of fact, or
- failure of the Disciplinary Review Task Force or the HFSA to conform to published criteria, policies, or procedures.

Only facts and conditions up to and including the time of the HFSA Certification Council's determination as represented by facts known to the HFSA are considered during an appeal. The appeal shall not include a hearing or any similar trial-type proceeding. Legal counsel is not expected to participate in the appeal process, unless requested by the appellant and approved by the HFSA and the Appeal Task Force. The HFSA and Appeal Task Force may consult legal counsel.

The Appeal Task Force conducts and completes the appeal review process within ninety days after receipt of the request for an appeal. Written appellate submissions and any reply submissions may be made by authorized representatives of the appellant and of the HFSA. Submissions are made according to whatever schedule is reasonably established by the Appeal Task Force. The decision of the Appeal Task Force either affirms or overrules the determination of the HFSA Certification Council but does not address a sanction imposed by the Council.

The Appeal Task Force decision is binding upon the HFSA, the candidate/certificant who is subject to the termination, and all other persons.

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## RESIGNATION

If a certificant who is the subject of a complaint voluntarily surrenders his or her HFSA certification at any time during the pendency of a complaint under these Procedures, the complaint is dismissed without any further action by the Disciplinary Review Task Force, the HFSA Certification Council, or an Appeal Task Force established after an appeal. The entire record is sealed, and the individual may not reapply for certification by the HFSA. However, the HFSA may authorize the Chair to communicate the fact and date of resignation, and the fact and general nature of the complaint, which was pending at the time of the resignation, to or at the request of a government entity engaged in the administration of law. Similarly, in the event of such resignation, the certificant's employer and the person or entity who submitted the complaint are notified of the fact and date of resignation and that HFSA has dismissed the complaint as a result.

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## REPORTING

A summary report of disciplinary complaints, decisions, and appeals is provided by the Practice and Patient Programs Department staff to the HFSA Board of Directors annually.

## HFSA REQUEST FOR TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS FORM

### CANDIDATE INFORMATION

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First Name

Last Name

Credentials

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Address

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City

State/Province

Zip/Postal Code

---

Country

Phone

Email

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Email

### SPECIAL TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS REQUEST

I request special accommodations as follows (check all that apply):

- Special seating or other physical accommodation
- Extended exam time (please specify amount): \_\_\_\_\_
- Separate exam room
- Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

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Candidate's Name

Signature

Date

PROFESSIONAL DOCUMENTATION AND EVALUATION

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL

Professional's First Name	Professional's Last Name	Credentials
Professional License Number	State/Province of Issue	
Employer	Job Title	
Address		
City	State/Province	Zip/Postal Code
Country	Mobile Phone	Work Phone
Email		
Printed Name	Signature	Date

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONAL DESCRIPTION OF CANDIDATE DISABILITY

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Professional evaluation must have been made no earlier than three (3) years prior to application.*

In my capacity as a \_\_\_\_\_, I evaluated \_\_\_\_\_  
Professional title Candidate name

on \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_.  
Date

**I have been informed of the nature of the examination to be administered. It is my opinion that because of this candidate's disability, as described above, he/she should receive the special testing accommodations requested on these forms.**