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(Left) VACC President Leigh Ann Bowe-Geddes, MSN, RN, VA-BC™. Photo provided by Leigh Ann Bowe-Geddes.

Letter from the President

Spring has arrived, and with it, the second issue of the VACC Newsletter.

If you have been following VACC on social media, you have seen that our team has been eager to shine a spotlight on our exemplary certificants these past few months as they break down barriers in vascular access and take strides to protect patients each day. VA-BC™s consistently go above and beyond, and on top of your own accomplishments, you have shown you are quick to support your colleagues through their adversities and accomplishments alike.

In a time where several facilities across the U.S., Canada and beyond are experiencing staffing shortages among nurses and health care professionals in general, we are reminded to be there for our colleagues, as VA-BC™s are in a habit of doing.

Vascular access is multidisciplinary, which allows us to learn from each other, share best practices and resources for continued learning, and lend a hand to a coworker in an overwhelming or complicated situation. This interprofessional environment allows clinicians to help one another grow and view clinical situations from different perspectives, no matter the letters behind someone's name. In 2021, 43% of applicants signed up for the exam due to a colleague's

recommendation, showing that VA-BC™s continually encourage others to build their knowledge and skills.

By sharing your stories, we hope to give VA-BC™s a space to cheer each other on, as they have always done. Whether it be through suggesting opportunities for continued education, sharing tips at work or simply offering a quick congratulations on social media, this support matters.

Reading on, you will find features with a few volunteers who help keep the VA-BC™ valuable, two respiratory therapists who hold their VA-BC™ and why they wanted to earn their certification, and a celebration of Asian American and Pacific Islander

Heritage Month. Plus, join us as we wish good luck to all those testing in June.

And, to anyone attending this month's National Teaching Institute from the American Association of Critical Care Nurses, come by the exhibit hall to say hello to VACC staff and President-Elect Joanne Dalusung. We would love to connect in-person!

Thank you for lifting up your fellow clinicians, and happy reading! ■

- Leigh Ann

Leigh Ann Lowe-Juddles, MSN, RN, VA-BC

Celebrating Certificants, Current and Future

The VACC board and staff would like to extend our congratulations to our newest certificants who passed the December 2021 VA-BC™ exam!

During the December 2021 cycle, 450 VA-BC™s successfully recertified from December 2018 and 361 candidates passed the VA-BC™ exam for initial certification. Our passing rate for the exam was 88%, giving the exam an average passing rate of 89% in 2021.

We're in the final weeks of preparation for those who will be taking the test or recertifying this June. As of May 1, 440 clinicians are getting ready to sit for their exam. Additionally, over 184 VA-BC™s have turned in their applications for recertification by CE, the deadline for which is June 1. We wish them all good luck!

Interested in seeing more about the VACC calendar? We've listed a few dates below to show what we're looking forward to this summer.

- May:** Mental Health Awareness Month
- May:** Jewish American Heritage Month
- May:** Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month
- May 6-12:** National Nurses Week
- May 11:** VACC Office Hours #1
- May 26:** VACC Office Hours #2
- June:** Pride Month
- June 1:** First day of testing
- June 1:** Recertification by CE applications due
- June 14:** June recerts receive digital badges
- June 30:** Last day of testing
- July 10:** June passing testers receive digital badges
- Sept 1:** December exam applications open
- Oct 15:** December exam applications close



VA-BC™s Find Their Voice Through Volunteering

Do you know what a stem is when it comes to test development? What about what we mean when we reference an “item”?

If these terms are familiar to you, you have probably been involved with some form of creating an exam like the VA-BC™. If you are scratching your head, don't worry—our volunteers can teach you.

From the yearly writing and reviewing of test questions, to board members, to the job analysis every 5 years, our volunteers keep the VA-BC™ up to industry standards and valuable to clinicians, patients, and the public.

Mickey, an independent research consultant, is a long-time volunteer with VACC. She currently serves on the test committee, which reviews and edits exam questions or “items” to select which items make the final cut. Those on the test committee make sure all the items previously submitted by the item writing committee are rigorous and appropriately referenced.

Mickey also helped create the first installment of the VA-BC™ exam in 2010 and remembers the feeling of volunteering for the first time.

“In some ways it's intimidating,” she said. “You don't have to have a doctorate to do this, you don't have to have a master's, just a knowledge and expertise in your field, even if it's just one aspect of it. Maybe you're a neonatal nurse that has a VA-BC™—we need you! Maybe you specialize in home care or geriatrics—we need you too. You don't have to know everything to be a volunteer.”

The test committee meets as a group four to six times over the course of a few months to conduct various exam development tasks, including:

“You don't have to know everything to be a volunteer.”



- reviewing newly written items to ensure they are relevant to the current test outline and do not include a language or geography bias
- reviewing the set of exam questions selected for a given test cycle to ensure there is no cueing (when one question signals the answer to another question)
- reviewing item performance after an exam cycle.

The item writing committee, on the other hand, tends to have more individual work than other roles, as they go through training on writing sound questions and each submit a certain number of items later.

“It's all learning. I learn every time I look at test questions,” Mickey said.

Rosalena, a registered nurse, is on the test committee with Mickey this year. Though she has never been to an in-person volunteer retreat like Mickey, she appreciates the opportunity to meet other VA-BC™s on the committee.

“I think it's fantastic to have a variety of people,” Rosalena said. “I've never placed an intraosseous device

myself, but a pediatric nurse that was on [a call] the other day said, 'I do them every day' and I said, 'you can be the expert on that.'"

This sharing of information and learning from one another is Mickey's favorite part about volunteering.

"You have to continually expose yourself to new information within your specialty because you don't know how that might apply. You might find something in the neonatal world that applies to the 99-year-old whose veins are just as fragile. It's fun! Who wants to approach a job and feel like you know everything?" Mickey said.

Rosalena first earned her VA-BC™ in 2015, but she volunteered for the first time in 2021. She said she decided to volunteer to make a difference in her certification.

"You do get CEUs but even without that it's a great

"I really enjoy being involved because it helps to give [certificants] a voice."

thing," she said. "I really enjoy being involved because it helps to give [certificants] a voice."

Mickey agreed.

"Knowing how much work that first exam took, I want to make sure that this generation of clinicians appreciate that without their help, it's not going to always be there," she said. "If they sit for the exam and they think 'this question should be on there' or 'that question shouldn't be on there': well, then get in there!"

"Things don't just happen by magic," she added. "It takes people." ■

**Full names of volunteers have been redacted for test security.*

A Whole New Ballgame: RRTs Step Up to The Vascular Access Plate

Registered respiratory therapists (RRTs) have been breaking onto the vascular access scene in recent years, but for Vicente Lopez, RRT, VA-BC™, it's been part of his job for nearly two decades.

"I was doing PICC lines before we had ultrasound guidance. I was kind of old school for PICCs," he laughed.

When the vascular access team at Lopez's hospital expanded, the nurse in charge looked to Lopez and his respiratory colleagues who worked in the operating room at the time. The respiratory therapists, Lopez said, already had the base knowledge needed to succeed in vascular access from their line of work, like sterile technique, gowning, and gloving.

"At the time, it was such a small hospital that everybody that worked here knew the respiratory therapists, their capabilities and what their training was. There was a lot of trust in us to do the right thing."

Even with previous experience, Lopez noted that there was a learning curve. Deciding the right device and maintaining a high level of patient care, all while

handling most vascular access in the facility, gave him a welcome challenge.

"You kind of have to be an adrenaline junkie to work here."

Tavia Grant, RRT, VA-BC™, had a similar experience. She divides her time at work between the vascular access team and respiratory care in the ICU. When she was first approached for the chance to work with the



vascular access team, she jumped at the chance to learn something new and expand her skills.

Even though she knew she had the drive to learn and the skills, she said the training came with a few nerves.

“It was a whole new ballgame. I catch onto things very easily, but in the back of my mind I was really nervous in the beginning because there are a lot of risks that come with central line placements. But the best way to learn is to do, and I got to do.”

“They knew so much about vascular access and were willing to be open to the change and share that knowledge. It was really important to them to put patients first.”

Before Grant and her coworkers started, three nurses made up the team. These three became mentors for the respiratory therapists that joined. Not only did the nurses help the trainees learn, but they made them feel welcome in a position that is largely held by nurses.

“They knew so much about vascular access and were willing to be open to the change and share that knowledge. It was really important to them to put patients first,” she said. “Not everyone is open to change like that.”

Now the team is made up of six nurses and four respiratory therapists. She notes that such a blended team allows the group to share their knowledge and skills with one another.

Grant and Lopez both said that their vascular access backgrounds allow them to be a resource for respiratory coworkers. Better yet, their skill in vascular access leads them to advocate for patients in the respiratory setting too.

“You have to have people skills [in vascular access],” Lopez said. “You have to be able to talk to some of the doctors and ask them ‘Can we do this instead?’ if you have the right answers. And the VA-BC™ has helped me have more of the right answers.”

Lopez and a colleague were the first on their team to become board certified in vascular access in July 2016. Soon after, the idea spread throughout the group. Now, the respiratory therapist-led vascular access team is almost 100% certified.

A perk of being VA-BC™ for Lopez is a chance to keep up to date in the vascular access world and continue learning. More importantly, though, it is a source of self-confidence.

“I have the VA-BC™ pin on my badge and there are people that see that and ask what it is,” he said. “And when there are some nurses that are traveling from other places, they’re coming from a place of ‘I didn’t know respiratory did this.’ The main [benefit] is the personal pride of having it and being able to explain what exactly it is.”

Grant said that gaining her credential in July 2019 gave her a confidence boost too, but it also signals her capabilities to patients.

“When a patient is nervous about a procedure, it’s a nice cherry on top. It helps put trust in your recommendations and your abilities.” ■



Shaping Today, Leading Tomorrow

According to [research](#) by New American Economy, more than one in five physicians and one in 11 nurses in the U.S. are Asian American or Pacific Islander. Even within VACC, around 12% of all VA-BC™s are Asian American or Pacific Islander. VACC is celebrating Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month this May to recognize such a significant player in the health care game.

"Having a specific day or month dedicated to Asian Pacific Americans acknowledges that we exist, we're here, and we're part of a bigger American community," said VACC President-Elect Joanne Dalusung, MSN, APRN, AGACNP-BC, CCRN, VA-BC™.

Dalusung fell in love with vascular access in her early days as a nurse in the Philippines, where every nurse is trained to start their peripheral IVs after graduation.

"As a bedside critical care nurse, my coworkers would call [me] to start an IV whether it was an adult or pediatric patient," she said. "I like procedures. I like the adrenaline."

After moving to the U.S., she became an ICU nurse, then transitioned to the vascular access team. In recent years, Dalusung has gained the title of a nurse practitioner at MD Anderson Cancer Center.

At the core of her profession, as a nurse or nurse practitioner, her mission is to provide patient care at a personal level. Often, she will talk patients through a procedure to put them at ease. In one instance, she asked about a 60-year-old patient's tattoo in the hopes of alleviating the woman's nerves and received a story that still makes Dalusung smile as she tells it.

Right: Joanne Dalusung, MSN, APRN, AGACNP-BC, CCRN, VA-BC™. Photo provided by Joanne Dalusung.



The tattoo was small, placed on the patient's left wrist in the shape of an infinity sign. She had recently gotten the tattoo for her daughter, who got a nearly identical design. Together, the tattoos read "For you I will do everything" for the patient and "For you, I will not fail" for the daughter.

"Those moments, as a health care provider, are the ones I treasure," she said. It is how she remembers her patient encounters. "We think we're taking care of them, but there are a lot of instances when we get life lessons and wisdom from our patients too."

Her love for her patients led her to become more involved in the vascular access community beyond her institution. Through visiting conferences, staying up to date on best practices and gaining her VA-BC™, she connected with other clinicians and advocated for her vascular access-dependent population: cancer patients.

In 2021, she became a Director on the VACC Board of Directors in the hopes of representing clinicians who give treatment to cancer patients. She was elected President-Elect this year and will ascend to President in 2023.

"I became more than just a practitioner who puts in an IV. I want to be an advocate, a voice," she said. "I think of the vascular access specialty as an art and science with ongoing opportunities for improvement."

To Dalusung, Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month means acknowledging the contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, both past and present.

"It's important that we know and look back to where we came from. There's nothing wrong with our culture or where we came from because it shaped us today, and it is what leads us tomorrow." ■



Members of Dalusung's unit at MD Anderson Cancer Center. Photo provided by Joanne Dalusung.

Keep in Mind

If you need a reminder on when you are due to recertify, our timeline below should give you a quick glance. Remember that recertification by CE applications open 10 months prior to when applications are due. For more information on dates and fees, please [visit our website](#).

VA-BC™ Attained

VA-BC™ Expires

VA-BC™ Renewal Documents and Fees Due Date

December 2021	December 31, 2024	December 1, 2024
June 2021	June 30, 2024	June 1, 2024
December 2020	December 31, 2023	December 1, 2023
June 2020	June 30, 2023	June 1, 2023
December 2019	December 31, 2022	December 1, 2022
June 2019	June 30, 2022	June 1, 2022

Not sure where to start with your VA-BC™ journey?

Take a look at our [Certification Toolkit](#) if you want to show your dedication to vascular access by taking the exam, or dive into our [Recertification Toolkit](#) if you're looking to renew your credential and your commitment to vascular access.

We like to hear from you! Remember to keep your information updated with VACC so we can reach you with any questions, concerns, or announcements. Log into the [Certificant Portal](#) and click the "My Profile" button to confirm that your information is right.

Visit the VA-BC™ Store

Wear your VA-BC™ on your sleeve with our VA-BC™ products. From pins to badges, we have what you need to share your achievement. [Shop all things VA-BC™ in our online store](#).

Stay connected with your VA-BC™ community

See what other VA-BC™s are accomplishing and celebrate together, get reminders on deadlines, and find updates on all things VA-BC™ on VACC social media. Ready to join the conversation?



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