



PREPARE FOR THE ACCREDITED CASE MANAGER (ACM) CERTIFICATION EXAM

How are you preparing to take the ACM Certification Exam? Preparatory materials, including a study guide, practice test and full length self-assessment exam are now available for ACM™ Certification candidates.

The study guide covers the key case management functions that will be tested on the ACM certification exam. The study guide also includes a practice test comprised of 25 multiple choice questions and 2 specialty simulations. Sections include:

- Guidelines for Exam Prep
- Overview of Exam Structure
- Testing Strategies
- Testing Domains: (1.) Screening & Assessment, (2.) Planning, (3.) Care Coordination, Transition & Intervention, and (4.) Evaluation
- Glossary of key terms
- References and Resources

Beverly Wagner RN, MBA, CCM, ACM; and Pat Kramer Ed. S, CCM, NCC, CSW, of the ACM™ Certification Study Guide Development Taskforce discuss the new ACM study guide and its value for certification candidates.

Why should case managers take the ACM exam?

Beverly Wagner (BW): ACM certification is a mark of distinction that benchmarks your knowledge and application of hospital and healthcare system case management in a respected and recognized way to you, your employer and the patients/clients you serve.

Pat Kramer (PK): ACM certification is an assurance for employers hiring new staff that the candidate has obtained a certain level of experience and possesses the knowledge and skills to do the job.

How has the ACM credential affected your job and/or career path?

BW: I am a nurse working in a Magnet-recognized hospital, and the number of nurses with professional certifications is one factor that contributes to Magnet recognition. The ACM is one of the professional certifications that is acknowledged by the Magnet program. In our industry, we've seen a growing trend toward the recognition of the ACM as a preferred credential in terms of hire, advancement and even salary.

PK: The ACM is a mark of professional achievement in Case Management. As a social worker, having this credential has increased my credibility when speaking about case management with the C-suite and other hospital leaders.

What are some of the most common misconceptions about the ACM exam?

BW: Each of the study guide authors have only seen one ACM exam – the one we each took to earn our credential. The experience can be a surprise if you're not well-prepared for what to expect in terms of the exam structure, its weighted scoring system, and the critical thinking skills required. Some case managers might also wonder how the ACM exam is different from other case management certification exams. The ACM is the only case management certification exam that focuses exclusively on hospital and healthcare system case management. I initially took another, more general case management exam, but wanted to add the ACM credential to validate my level of knowledge in the area of my practice.

PK: The most common misconception I hear from colleagues who have not yet taken the test is that there is a separate test for nurses and social workers. I am careful to educate them on the format of the test – that there is a multiple-choice portion of the test that is common to both disciplines. This section focuses on basic case management knowledge as outlined in the Scope of Services and Standards of Practice of the ACMA, the Conditions of Participation and other regulatory guidelines. Then there is a simulation portion of the test that is specific to discipline. Nurses and social workers may approach situations differently, and the specificity of the simulations allow both disciplines to use their knowledge base to work through the situations.

Can you tell us a little about the development process for the study guide? What were the development team's goals in creating the study guide?

BW: From the first meeting of the writing team, our mission has been to help future candidates successfully prepare to take the exam. It wasn't about sharing everything we've learned over our years in case management (which adds up to over 100 years!), or even sharing our thoughts about where case management is, or should be, headed. Our objectives were all about helping the case manager with a couple of years' experience, a set goal to achieve certification, and a need for help in preparing for the exam. We reminded ourselves of that mission frequently during our discussions on what material to include, or how to write on a particular topic.

To maintain ACM exam integrity, we could not see a copy of the current exam, or even talk with the current test writers. Using the ACM Candidate Handbook as a roadmap, we instead relied on our own exam experience and collective knowledge in the practice of case management. We tried hard to write a study guide that would give the candidate a preparatory experience most consistent with the actual test.

Our team of writers divided up content and each wrote chapters that mirrored the content division in the ACM Candidate Handbook. Each writer submitted her work to the writers' group and we dissected each other's work on weekly phone calls. After we reached a consensus, each chapter was sent to a team of editors, who had the enormously challenging job of helping us get to a consistent writing voice and creating a work reflective of the study guide's objectives while still being easy to read and digest. The editors sent their files back to us, and we again discussed them on weekly calls. We checked and cross-checked references and created a glossary of key words, terms, and abbreviations. There was another round of editorial review and writer review before we declared a chapter final. After we had content finalized, the ACMA technical team and I worked on formatting to support ease of reading and ways to call attention to key points.

That process was just for the text! We then came to the practice exam questions and returned to the ACM Candidate Handbook for guidance. The practice exam questions are meant to proportionately mirror the domains found on the exam. The study questions were written by a team comprised of our writers' group and other ACM colleagues who agreed to help, and they too went through an extensive, multi-tier review process.

The study guide's practice test and self-assessment exam also include situational judgment scenarios, structured similarly to those on the ACM exam. This is the area we heard was the most challenging for past candidates. Just as in the actual exam, the scenario vignettes are written in pairs, with a slightly different focus for nurses and social workers. After a candidate goes through a scenario, feedback is provided for each possible choice to explain why it is or is not correct. We consider the simulations alone to be of tremendous value to candidates preparing for the exam.

What areas/domains does the study guide cover?

BW: The ACM exam is grouped into four domains and our study guide mirrors those:

1. Assessment
2. Planning
3. Care Coordination, Transitions, and Intervention
4. Evaluation

In addition, we added content on preparation and test taking strategies, both for the multiple choice and scenario sections. The study guide also includes links to references, further suggested reading, and a substantial glossary of terms.

How long does it take someone to complete the study guide? When should candidates start preparing?

BW: As we say over and over in the guide, preparation is the key to candidate comfort and success in taking the exam. The amount and exact scope of preparation is going to vary by candidate – a case manager with two years of hospital case management experience in one specific patient population will need to spend more time preparing than a case manager with ten years of experience across a variety of patient populations. The guide is set up to allow candidates to focus

only on those areas needed for refresher, or to serve as a comprehensive guide to the body of knowledge tested on the exam.

Most adults learn best through time-spaced repetition, so we believe starting early is always better. Setting aside 20-30 minutes a day to read content and think about how that content applies to practice will yield better retention and the ability to apply that knowledge to critical thinking situations on the exam.

How does the study guide stand out from other preparatory materials or resources available?

BW: I believe the biggest difference is that the guide and practice tests are 100% electronic. We made that decision based on our philosophy that the preparation experience needed to be as much like the actual exam as possible. The exam is 100% electronic, and we want candidates to prepare and learn in an environment that resembles the actual test as much as possible. We think we accomplished that and more – the built-in feedback and recommendations for the practice test and self-assessment examination provide candidates with the opportunity to adjust to the testing style of the ACM exam while fine tuning the critical thinking skill required. Adjusting to the format of the exam can be half the battle!

PK: When I took the ACM exam, I had never experienced a simulation-type format in a testing situation before. Reading about it just did not prepare me for the reality of the test, and I admit to being challenged by this. The study guide will prevent this from happening to new candidates. Because the new study guide, its practice test and self-assessment exam are 100% electronic, the testing format will not be a surprise to anyone.

What can someone who purchases the study guide expect? (What is included, what does it have to offer?)

BW: Candidates who purchase the study guide will be provided with an all-inclusive resource for exam preparation. All exam objectives are addressed in detail and are often incorporated into a case study format to help candidates understand real-world application of case management principles. The authors additionally put some thought into what would help candidates in terms of recommended study and test taking strategies.

Every study guide purchase comes with a sample practice exam. Questions have been written to challenge candidates to think in the ways necessary for successful completion of the ACM examination. The simulation practice questions are purposely longer and may have more options than actual exam scenarios. This was done intentionally to give candidates the opportunity to adjust to the testing style and critical thinking required, and also to become accustomed to the exam format.

Candidates have the additional opportunity to purchase a complete, timed self-assessment examination modeled after the ACM exam in length, format and topic domains. We intended this tool to be the last step in gauging readiness for the actual exam. Its built-in results and recommendations can also help candidates identify weak areas of knowledge, application or test taking strategy.

Learn more and order your ACM™ Certification Study Guide today at www.acmaweb.org/study_guide.