Do exam questions have more than one correct answer, and how is the correct answer determined?

A multiple-choice question is constructed so that only someone who has mastered the subject matter will select the correct answer; to that person, only one option will appear to be the correct answer. To someone who lacks a firm grasp of the subject matter, all options may look plausible.

The exam is the end result of many test development activities that take place throughout a two-year period. Registered Psychiatric Nurses, RPN clinicians and RPN administrators from across Canada create and evaluate the exam questions with assistance from ASI test consultants, who ensure that the RPNCE meets the Blueprint guidelines and specifications.

Each question on the exam is supported by two references. Most of these references have been published within the past five years. The purpose of the references is twofold: (1) to indicate that the correct answer within each question has authoritative support from at least two experts in the field and (2) to provide a source for further reading and review. Every attempt has been made to use references that are up-to-date, accessible and accepted within the nursing community.

Does each question have equal weight on the exam?

Each exam question has the same value: one mark. Your score on the exam is calculated as the number of questions that you answered correctly. In this process, each question is worth one, and only one, mark.

Are there any questions that you must answer correctly to pass the exam?

The answer to this question is "no". There are no critical questions that a candidate must answer correctly to receive a passing score on the RPNCE. Each exam question has the same value: one mark.

How is the pass mark for the exam set?

The pass mark is set in reference to the content and the difficulty of the test questions. The pass mark is NOT set using a norm-referenced approach such as "bell curving". The pass mark is set by a panel of content experts from across Canada. These content experts work closely with entry-level Registered Psychiatric Nurses, and include educators, experienced practitioners and administrators. The pass mark is set at a level that represents the performance expected of a competent entry-level psychiatric nurse.

The panel of content experts reviews each exam question and produces ratings based on a common understanding of a competent entry-level psychiatric nurse. In addition to these ratings, a variety of relevant data (for example, information on the preparation of new graduates, data on results from previously administered exam) are carefully considered to ensure that the pass mark that candidates must achieve on the exam is valid and fair. Based on this information, an appropriate pass mark is set. Also, to ensure fairness, the different versions of the exam are equated so that all candidates have to meet the same standard regardless of the version of the exam.

For each form of the RPNCE, the pass mark is the same across writing centres and across the four western provinces.