

# Advanced Practice Provider Fellowship Accreditation



## CASE STUDY: Northwell Health's Journey to APPFA® Accreditation with Distinction

### BACKGROUND

Northwell Health is the largest healthcare system in New York State, encompassing 28 hospitals, more than 1,000 ambulatory practices, and a broad geographic footprint spanning New York City, Long Island, Westchester, the Hudson Valley, and parts of Connecticut. The organization employs approximately 4,500 Advanced Practice Providers (APPs), including nurse practitioners (NPs), physician assistants (PAs), and certified midwives.

The Northwell Health Advanced Practice Provider Fellowship Program is housed within the Center for Advanced Providers, Division of Education and Fellowships and launched its first fellowship cohort in 2018. The program was designed to address transition-to-practice gaps for newly graduated APPs through structured, mentored postgraduate training. The fellowship is a 12-month, multi-specialty program with biannual start dates and emphasizes learner development rather than immediate service integration.

From its inception, program leaders intentionally aligned fellowship design with national accreditation standards. In April 2025, Northwell Health achieved ANCC Advanced Practice Provider Fellowship Accreditation (APPFA) with Distinction, validating the program's quality, consistency, and sustainability.

### CHALLENGES

- Addressing persistent transition-to-practice barriers for newly graduated NPs and PAs across diverse specialties.
- Meeting growing demand from new graduates seeking formal postgraduate training and structured support.
- Designing a fellowship program that could scale across multiple hospitals, specialties, and geographic regions while maintaining consistency.
- Securing financial and executive buy-in for accreditation by clearly demonstrating return on investment, workforce impact, and long-term value.
- Selecting an accrediting body that aligns with interprofessional practice, organizational values, and future growth plans.
- Managing the complexity of accreditation preparation across multiple tracks and sites without disrupting ongoing program operations.

## **SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES**

Northwell Health adopted a proactive, standards-based approach to fellowship development and accreditation.

## **PROGRAM DESIGN AND ALIGNMENT**

- Designed the fellowship program around accreditation standards from inception, reducing the need for retroactive program redesign.
- Established a learner-first philosophy, with fellows functioning as paid learners rather than service-dependent providers.
- Built the program around their Four C's of Excellence:
  - Competence
  - Confidence
  - Compassion
  - Cognizance (career growth awareness)

## **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND FINANCIAL JUSTIFICATION**

- Secured executive support by framing accreditation as a strategic investment, not a sunk cost.
- Anchored the business case in three financial pillars:
  - Quality and safety (risk reduction, readiness, defensibility)
  - Credibility and consistency (brand strength, recruitment, scalability)
  - Sustainability and growth (pipeline development, reduced external hiring).
- Budgeted for accreditation in advance of application cycles, aligning fiscal planning with readiness timelines.

## **ACCREDITATION PREPARATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

- Selected ANCC APPFA based on brand credibility, interprofessional representation, transparency, scalability, and organizational alignment.
- Leveraged APPFA resources extensively, including:
  - Templates
  - Webinars and workshops
  - Direct staff communication
  - Site visit preparation tools.
- Centralized documentation, data, and writing workflows using shared digital platforms.
- Utilized structured trackers to monitor writing progress, documentation completion, and readiness milestones.
- Distributed writing responsibilities across program leaders, track directors, fellows, and stakeholders, while maintaining a unified narrative voice.

## RESULTS

- Achieved ANCC APPFA Accreditation with Distinction (April 2025).
- Established a 12-month, multi-specialty APP fellowship program with biannual start dates.
- Developed and accredited 10 specialty tracks initially, with ongoing expansion plans.
- Currently offers 14 specialty tracks, with additional tracks in development, including:
  - OB/GYN / Women's Health
  - Urology
  - Hematology (sickle cell focus)
  - Thoracic transplant.
- Since program inception in 2018, the fellowship has:
  - Graduated over 100 Fellows
  - Achieved a 98% offer rate for post-fellowship employment
  - Maintained a 92% retention rate within the health system.
- Demonstrated interprofessional balance among graduates:
  - 67 Physician Assistants
  - 63 Nurse Practitioners, reflecting an approximately 50/50 distribution.
- Successfully met APPFA survey participation requirements, achieving greater than required compliance within the survey window through proactive engagement and tracking.

## OUTCOMES

- Established a robust internal workforce pipeline, supporting Northwell Health's "train-to-retain" philosophy.
- Improved readiness of newly graduated APPs to practice at the top of their licenses, reducing supervision burden and early-career remediation needs.
- Enhanced recruitment competitiveness by offering accredited postgraduate training aligned with national standards.
- Standardized fellowship structure and outcomes across multiple hospitals and specialties, enabling predictable scaling and expansion.
- Strengthened program credibility with internal and external stakeholders through external validation and accreditation with distinction.
- Embedded continuous performance improvement into fellowship operations, using accreditation feedback to refine processes and elevate program quality.
- Positioned the program for future opportunities, including grant funding, program growth, and additional accreditation cycles.

## CONCLUSIONS

Northwell Health's journey to APPFA accreditation illustrates the value of designing postgraduate APP training programs with accreditation in mind from the outset. By aligning fellowship development with national standards, securing early stakeholder buy-in, and leveraging accreditation as a strategic framework rather than a compliance exercise, Northwell Health built a scalable, sustainable, and high-performing program.

Achieving APPFA Accreditation with Distinction validated the organization's commitment to educational excellence, workforce development, and interprofessional practice. More importantly, the accreditation process strengthened the fellowship itself—transforming it from a strong program into a consistently high-quality, system-wide model for advanced practice provider transition to practice.

Advanced Practice Provider Fellowship Accreditation (APPFA®) recognizes programs that provide exceptional post-graduate fellowships for advanced practice providers (APPs) (APRNs and PAs). Accreditation validates the quality of your fellowship, helping to attract top talent and improve patient outcomes.

Contact us at [APPFA@ana.org](mailto:APPFA@ana.org).

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