



## Impact of Nursing Certification on nurses, healthcare employers and patients



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### Introduction

Certification is the formal recognition of specialized knowledge, skills and experience that are formally acknowledged by passing a national standardized specialty nursing examination.<sup>1</sup> While mandatory state licensure legally allows a nurse to practice in a given state, specialty certification is a private, voluntary program that reflects individual achievement of a standard beyond basic licensure for specialty nursing practice.<sup>2</sup>

Certification in any field is a mark of professionalism. Over the last few decades, it has become increasingly clear that nursing certification advances the profession of nursing by encouraging and recognizing professional achievement.<sup>3</sup> There are now well over 800,000 nurses certified by the American Board of Nursing Specialties,<sup>4</sup> and this number increases significantly each year.

In a 2006 survey by the American Board of Nursing Specialties

(ABNS), more than 11,000 nurse respondents perceived value in nursing certification.<sup>3</sup> Among the top values, certification is perceived to enhance professional recognition and credibility, and confirms a nurse's competence and capabilities to peers, patients and administrators<sup>3</sup> and indicates a level of clinical competence.<sup>3</sup> In this survey, more than 90 percent of respondents agreed that certification validates specialized knowledge, enhances professional credibility and indicates a level of clinical competence; more than 80 percent agreed that certification promotes recognition from peers and other health professionals.<sup>3</sup>

Many research studies published in the past decade demonstrate the significant benefits of nursing certification for the practicing nurse, the healthcare facilities for which they work and the patients they serve. These benefits are outlined below. In addition, there is an extensive bibliography to complete this summary of nursing certification.

### Benefits to individual nurses



1. Certified nurses are recognized and respected. Certification verifies a high level of knowledge, competence and performance to peers, patients, supervisors and administrators.<sup>3</sup> Nurses validate their mastery of skills, knowledge and abilities through certification and meet ongoing learning and practice requirements through recertification.<sup>3</sup>
2. Certified nurses have proven their competence in their specialty area. Certified nurses have distinguished themselves in their specialty area.<sup>2</sup> In addition, continued competency requirements for certification renewal ensure that certified nurses remain up to date with the latest developments in their specialties.<sup>2</sup> Researchers have found that certification provides recognition of nurses' knowledge and expertise, which is empowering.<sup>5</sup>
3. Certified nurses have more job opportunities. Studies have shown that almost 90 percent of nurse managers would hire a certified nurse over a noncertified nurse if everything else were equal. In addition, certified nurses earn significantly more money than registered nurses who are not certified.<sup>2</sup> In additional studies, nurses have identified benefits of certification to include personal recognition and credibility, professional achievement, career advancement, personal accomplishment and higher pay.<sup>2,6</sup>
4. Certified nurses have more professional opportunities. These nurses are more likely to be promoted within their facilities. Certified nurses have been shown to possess increased access to job-related power,<sup>1</sup> and many studies have shown that certification is valued by employers, peers and consumers.<sup>1</sup>
5. Certified nurses are more confident and credible. Increasing data indicate that obtaining specialty certification promotes quality patient care, validates nurses' knowledge and expertise, builds confidence and credibility in professional ability and demonstrates dedication to nursing as a profession.<sup>2</sup>
6. Certified nurses earn more money. Multiple studies have shown that certified nurses are paid more than their noncertified colleagues. In addition to tangible financial benefits, certified nurses also enjoy career ladder advancement.<sup>5</sup>
7. Certified nurses are valued by the U.S. government. There is significant support available for obtaining nursing certification for nurses working for the U.S. government. There is a strong push in the U.S. military and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to significantly increase the percentage of certified nurses in their healthcare facilities.<sup>3</sup>

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## Benefits to healthcare facilities

Employers who embrace and support nurse certification are better positioned to thrive in the highly competitive healthcare market. Certified nurses have demonstrated mastery of skills, knowledge and abilities through national certification, and exhibit a higher level of professionalism and a culture of retention, a critical issue given the current nursing shortage.<sup>1</sup>

Certification also is a vehicle for organizations to differentiate themselves from competitors and strongly demonstrate to consumers that they have attracted the most skilled and qualified nursing professionals.<sup>7</sup> In addition, results of a recent study show that hospitals with a larger percentage of nurses who have baccalaureate degrees and certification had lower 30-day mortality and failure-to-rescue rates.<sup>5</sup>

The ANCC Magnet Recognition Program, AACN BEACON Award for Critical Care Excellence and Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recognize that certification of nursing staff is a key component of excellence and enhances healthcare facilities' potential for distinction.<sup>2</sup>

In addition, The Joint Commission looks favorably on healthcare facilities with a high percentage of certified nurses, and certification positively impacts accreditation and grant funding.<sup>2</sup>

Certified nurses are associated with higher-quality patient care. A certification as an indicator of quality and public awareness of the value of nursing certification definitely is on the rise.<sup>2</sup>

Certified nurses help improve employee retention rates. Certification is a component of a positive work environment and benefits nurse managers, hospital administrators and other employers in significant ways.<sup>2</sup> The American Board of Nursing Specialties maintains that employers should support nurses seeking and maintaining certification, inform the public about the certification status of their workforce and market the accomplishments of certified nurses.<sup>2</sup>

## Benefits to patients

As healthcare has become more complex, it has become increasingly vital to ensure the public that healthcare professionals are competent. Certification is recognized as critical to improving patient care.<sup>8</sup> Certification protects the public and enables consumers to readily identify competent professionals.<sup>8</sup>



1. Certified nurses make fewer medical errors.<sup>2,9</sup> The Institute of Medicine estimates that up to 200,000 deaths occur annually in the U.S. because of preventable medical errors.<sup>10</sup>
2. With fewer medical errors overall, healthcare costs to patients decrease. The Institute

of Medicine estimates that preventable medication errors alone add more than \$3.5 billion to annual healthcare costs in the U.S.<sup>11</sup>

3. Certified nurses are held to higher standards. With certified nurses, patients and their families/caregivers are assured that these individuals have reached a nationally recognized standard of practice.<sup>2</sup>
4. Certified nurses provide improved patient care. Multiple research studies demonstrate this benefit in a variety of nursing specialties, including emergency, critical care, rehabilitation, oncology, neuroscience, hospice, medical-surgical and many others.

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