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Guest Editorial

The Value of Certification

Certification reflects achievement beyond a basic level of knowledge and requires continued learning and skill development to maintain the certification credential (ABNS, 2005). Recent research has shown that nurses who are certified report a greater confidence in their practice (51%), decision-making ability (35%), and ability to detect complications (28%); have more effective communication and collaboration with other healthcare team members (23%); and fewer adverse events and errors in patient care (6%) (Ballard, 2003; Cary, 2001; Whittaker, Smolenski, & Carson, 2000). In addition, the average full-time annual income of a certified nurse is almost \$10,000 higher than a non-certified nurse (Robinson & Mee, 2004).

The Certification Board of Gastroenterology Nurses and Associates (CBGNA) administers a certification exam to registered nurses actively practicing for a minimum of 2 years full-time (4,000 hours) in clinical, supervisory, administrative, teaching/education, or research roles. According to the CBGNA Certification Handbook (www.cbгна.org), the purpose of certification is to:

- Demonstrate accountability to the general public
- Enhance quality patient care
- Recognize professional nurses who have met an accepted level of experience and demonstrated a standard of knowledge specific to gastroenterology and endoscopy nursing practice
- Promote personal satisfaction
- Provide employers a means to recognize professionals who have met a standard of achievement.

The CBGNA exam is developed based on a role delineation that is conducted every 3 to 5 years. The role delineation is used to identify the knowledge and ability required to perform important aspects of the gastroenterology nursing role. Nurses who participate in the role delineation are purposefully selected based on the diversity of their practice setting, educational background, and commitment to certification.

During the role delineation process, members of the role delineation task force identify the most frequently performed nursing tasks and rank them

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according to importance. This role delineation is then used to develop the blueprint for the certification exam. Because the knowledge required to practice in this specialty is constantly changing, the role delineation allows the exam to stay current and relevant to the examinee.

Certification is not a one-time achievement. In order for the nurse to maintain certification recognition, he or she must periodically demonstrate current knowledge and documentation of continued learning. Regulatory agencies such as the National Association for Healthcare Quality (NAHQ, 2004) and American Nurses Credentialing Center (2005) support certification and continuing education through recertification in order to improve patient safety and quality of care.

The CBGNA believes that certification can help gastroenterology nurses expand their roles in providing patient services; earn more money; advance their careers; improve patient care; and find greater job satisfaction. All indications are that healthcare reform and cost containment will mandate more direct patient care by nurse specialists. In the near future, nurse specialists may qualify to perform diagnostic procedures, practice independently, provide care reimbursed by third party payers, and manage and follow up on patients. Hospitals and clinics will seek nurse specialists in order to attract provider contracts. How will nurse specialists be identified? They will be certified nurses.

The American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS, 2005) conducted a recent survey reporting that 90% of nurse manager respondents clearly preferred hiring certified nurses over non-certified nurses. Fifty-eight percent reported seeing a positive performance difference in certified nurses versus their non-certified colleagues. Furthermore, 86.8% of respondents indicated if everything else were equal, they'd hire a certified nurse over a non-certified nurse. The reasons given for preference of certified nurses included a proven knowledge base in a given specialty (85.5%) and greater professional commitment to lifelong learning (77.5%). Interestingly, 58% of respondents for the ABNS study were non-certified. Even without holding certification themselves, respondents identified and valued the importance of certification (Stromborg, 2005).

The current research on specialty nursing certification clearly demonstrates both tangible and intangible benefits of certification. Certification validates one's qualifications and advanced competence. It demonstrates one's professional aspirations and desire to improve the quality of patient care and delivery of services. Certification rewards one's continuing efforts to improve knowledge and skills in our profession. Certification reflects commitment in time, effort, and expense to gastroenterology nursing. Certification assures professional recognition from one's peers and colleagues. Certification will win recognition for both one's competence and professionalism. Don't get left behind. Get certified.

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