

# AACN CERTIFICATION CORPORATION FACT SHEET

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## BACKGROUND

The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, the world's largest specialty nursing organization, has been serving the needs of nurses caring for acutely and critically ill patients since 1969. AACN Certification Corporation was established in 1975 as a separate entity to provide comprehensive credentialing for nurses to ensure that their practice is consistent with established standards of excellence in caring for acutely and critically ill patients and their families. AACN Certification Corporation accomplishes its mission through providing certification exams, renewal programs and credentialing opportunities for individuals involved in care of acutely and critically ill patients.

## NUMBER OF CERTIFIED NURSES

As of January 2001, nurses in the U.S. and Canada held more than 410,000 certifications in 134 specialties. These certifications were granted by 67 different certifying organizations, and at least 95 different credentials designate these certifications. Currently, there are more than 58,000 certified acute and critical care nurses bearing the CCRN, PCCN, CCNS, ACNPC, CNML, CMC and CSC credentials.

## EXAMS

AACN Certification Corporation develops and administers the CCRN, PCCN, CCNS and ACNPC specialty certifications and the CMC and CSC subspecialty certifications and partners with AONE on the CNML certification program. These exams have been demonstrated to be legally defensible and psychometrically sound indicators of mastery of the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to practice effectively. The exams are administered via computer-based testing at over 170 locations across the U.S. The exams are open to nurses caring for acutely and critically ill patients who meet the eligibility requirements, which include a specified period of clinical practice in the role being tested and a current unencumbered RN or APRN license.

## CCRN®

CCRN certification is awarded to critical care nurses who have passed the 150-question, three-hour certification exam and who meet the eligibility requirements for hours of clinical practice in care of acutely and/or critically ill patients. Separate exams exist for nurses who care for adult, neonatal and pediatric patients. Eligible nurses must complete 1,750 hours in direct bedside care of acutely or critically ill (adult, neonatal or pediatric) patients within the last two years preceding date of application, with 875 of those hours accrued in the most recent year preceding application. CCRN certification may be renewed every three years. Certification renewal requires 432 hours in direct bedside care of acutely and/or critically ill (adult, neonatal or pediatric) patients during the three-year certification period, with 144 of those hours accrued in the year prior to the scheduled renewal date. Renewal also requires nurses to obtain 100 Continuing Education Recognition Points (CERPs) in specific categories (A, B & C) during the three-year certification period. Visit [www.certcorp.org](http://www.certcorp.org) for information about the Renewal by Synergy CERPs program. A separate renewal category, CCRN-E, is available to nurses who work exclusively or primarily in a remote ICU environment (e.g., an electronic ICU or e-ICU®) and meet practice and continuing education eligibility requirements.

## AACN CERTIFICATION CORPORATION FACT SHEET (continued)

- PCCN®** PCCN certification is awarded to progressive care nurses who have passed the 125-question, 2 1/2-hour certification exam and who meet eligibility requirements for hours of clinical practice. Nurses who have 1,750 hours in direct bedside care of acutely ill patients during the previous two years, with 875 of those accrued in the most recent year preceding application are eligible. Progressive care collectively describes the areas known as intermediate care units, direct observation units, step-down units, telemetry units or transitional care units, as well as a specific level of patient care. PCCN certification must be renewed every three years. Certification renewal requires 432 hours in direct bedside care of (adult, neonatal or pediatric) acutely ill patients during the three-year certification period, with 144 of those hours accrued in the 12-month period prior to the scheduled renewal date. Renewal also requires that nurses obtain 100 Continuing Education Recognition Points (CERPs) in specific categories (A, B & C) during the three-year certification period.
- CCNS®** CCNS certification is awarded to clinical nurse specialists who have passed the 175-question, 3 1/2-hour certification exam and who meet the eligibility requirements of completing an accredited graduate advanced practice education program with a concentration as clinical nurse specialist. Candidates must have 500 hours of supervised clinical practice directly related to all role components of the clinical nurse specialist within the master's program. Separate exams exist for clinical nurse specialists trained to care for adult, pediatric and neonatal patients. CCNS certification must be renewed every four years. Certification renewal requires 2,000 hours of direct care of acutely and/or critically ill patients in the role of the CNS during the four-year certification period, with 400 hours of those hours in the 12 months preceding the scheduled renewal date. Eligible renewal candidates may either retake the CCNS exam or complete 60 Category A CE credits, 15 of which must be within the area of acute/critical care educational programs.
- ACNPC®** ACNPC certification is awarded to acute care nurse practitioners who have passed the 175-question, 3 1/2-hour certification exam and who meet the eligibility requirements of completing an accredited graduate advanced practice education program with a concentration as an acute care nurse practitioner. Candidates must have 500 hours of supervised clinical practice directly related to all role components of the acute care nurse practitioner within the master's program. ACNPC certification is for acute care nurse practitioners who care for acutely and/or critically ill adult patients and must be renewed every five years. Certification renewal requires 2,000 hours in the role of an acute care nurse practitioner over the five-year certification period, with a minimum of 400 hours in the 12 months preceding the scheduled renewal date. Eligible renewal candidates may retake the ACNPC exam or complete 150 Category A CE credits in adult acute/ critical care education. Candidates may also obtain the ACNPC through Certification by Endorsement, available to nurses currently certified as Acute Care Nurse Specialists by another accredited organization.

# AACN CERTIFICATION CORPORATION FACT SHEET (continued)

## CMC®

CMC (cardiac medicine) subspecialty certification is awarded to *certified* nurses who have passed the 90-question, 2-hour certification exam and who meet eligibility requirements for clinical practice. Eligible nurses must complete 1,750 hours in direct bedside care of acutely or critically ill patients during the previous two years, with 875 of those hours accrued in the most recent year preceding application. Of those 1,750 hours, 875 must be in care of acutely and/or critically ill cardiac patients. CMC subspecialty certification must be tied to a clinical nursing specialty certification (e.g., CCRN, PCCN, CCNS, ACNPC, etc.) and may be renewed every three years. Certification renewal is obtained through completion of 25 Category A Clinical Judgment CERPs (Continuing Education Recognition Points) pertaining to cardiology, along with 432 hours of direct bedside care of acutely/critically ill cardiac patients, with 144 of those hours accrued in the year preceding the scheduled renewal date.

## CSC®

CSC (cardiac surgery) subspecialty certification is awarded to *certified* nurses who have passed the 90-question, 2-hour certification exam and who meet the eligibility requirements for clinical practice. Eligible nurses must complete 1,750 hours in direct bedside care of acutely and/or critically ill patients during the previous two years, with 875 of those hours accrued in the most recent year preceding application. Of those 1,750 hours, 875 must be in the care of cardiac surgery patients within the first 48 hours postoperatively. CSC subspecialty certification must be tied to a clinical nursing specialty certification (e.g., CCRN, PCCN, CCNS, ACNPC, etc.) and may be renewed every three years. Certification renewal is obtained through completion of 25 Category A Clinical Judgment CERPs (Continuing Education Recognition Points) pertaining to cardiac surgery, along with 432 hours of direct bedside care of cardiac patients within the first 48 hours postoperatively, with 144 of those hours accrued in the year preceding the scheduled renewal date.

## CNML

CNML certification, offered in partnership between AACN and the American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE), is awarded to nurse managers who have passed the 115-question, 2-hour certification exam and who meet eligibility requirements for education and clinical practice. CNML gives nurse managers a way to validate their knowledge as they strive to excel in demanding roles carrying out complex leadership responsibilities that directly affect the quality of care to patients and families. Eligible candidates must have a BSN or higher plus 2 years in the nurse manager role OR a Bachelor's degree not in nursing plus 3 years in the nurse manager role OR a Diploma or Associate's degree plus 5 years in the nurse manager role. CNML may be renewed every 3 years. Certification renewal is obtained through completion of 45 contact hours of continuing professional education over the 3-year certification period.

AACN  

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CERTIFICATION  
CORPORATION

*Certification Organization for the American Association of Critical Care Nurses*

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