Certification Credential Position Statement

Today's acutely and critically ill patients require heightened vigilance and extraordinarily intricate care. As skilled and responsible health professionals, the 516,000 acute and critical care nurses in the United States must acquire the specialized knowledge and skills needed to provide this care and demonstrate their competence to the public, their employers and their profession. Certification, a process by which a nongovernmental agency validates based upon predetermined standards an individual nurse’s qualification and knowledge for practice in a defined functional or clinical area of nursing, provides validation of such specialized knowledge and skills.

The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) and AACN Certification Corporation, representing more than 90,000 certified acute and critical care nurses, strongly believe that allowing nurses to wear credentials on their badge validates that the nurse has demonstrated experience, knowledge and skills in the specialty areas of acute and/or critical care. Displaying employees' certification credentials is a meaningful way to demonstrate organizational support for the value of certification and a commitment to the delivery of safe, high-quality healthcare and enhanced professional development.

Benefits of Certification
Certification is a mark of excellence that benefits patients, nurses and employers. Specialty and subspecialty certification points to nurses' commitment to career development and dedication to patient care and safety. Support for continuing education and certification has been found to be drivers of nurses' job satisfaction and essential to nurse recruitment and retention. Research has shown that certification is linked to job/career satisfaction and perceptions of empowerment among acute and critical care nurses.

Nurses whose clinical judgment has been validated through certification often make decisions with greater confidence. Confidence and knowledge can contribute to recognizing situations at risk for failure to rescue and can reduce the likelihood of medical errors such as incorrect prescriptions, insufficient or absent documentation and failure to address the needs of patients and their families. The more knowledgeable the nurses, the better they can recognize problems and intervene appropriately, resulting in fewer medical errors.

Myth of Being Held to Higher Standard
There is no evidence to support perceptions that certification contributes to increased liability because of a higher standard of care. AACN asserts that signing a document with a credential does not, in and of itself, increase the liability of the hospital or the nurse. In fact, Marsh Affinity Group Services — a leader in insurance program management and provider of AACN-sponsored liability insurance for members — indicates that certification is an advantage from a liability standpoint. Marsh offers AACN-certified nurses a risk management credit on liability insurance premiums, recognizing that certification raises competency-levels in the nursing profession.

Display of Credentials
Credentials identify the qualifications of nursing personnel who are providing care. AACN believes that nurses who successfully meet the criteria for certification have earned the right to use and professionally display credentials on their name badge and following their signature on official records. Prominently and legibly displaying a credential demonstrates recognition of the healthcare providers' obligation to a patient and family to receive adequate information and to be informed about the person(s) responsible for their care. A certified nurse is certified whether or not the credential is listed or printed after their name or displayed on a nametag.

Continued
Proper Use of Credentials
Candidates who pass an AACN Certification Corporation nursing specialty or subspecialty certification exam may use the corresponding credential after their licensing credential following AACN Corporation standards, as shown in the respective certification exam handbook (e.g., RN, CCRN). For example, a subspecialty credential should be attached to a current accredited clinical nursing specialty certification with a hyphen (e.g., RN, PCCN-CMC). If the specialty credential expires, the subspecialty credential can only be displayed when affixed to another current, accredited clinical nursing specialty certification. If a nurse has two subspecialty credentials, both may be affixed to the same specialty certification with a hyphen (e.g., CCRN-CMC-CSC).

Nurses certified in the care of one patient population (adult, pediatric or neonatal) and move to work with a different patient population may not represent themselves as a CCRN, CCRN-K or CCNS without first becoming certified in the patient population with whom they are working. For example, a nurse certified as an Adult CCRN who transfers to a pediatric intensive care unit must not represent him or herself as a CCRN while working with pediatric patients unless he or she passes the Pediatric CCRN exam. AACN credentials are trademarks or registered service marks. They are not punctuated with periods.

Requirements for Certification
Choosing to become certified enables a professional to validate expertise in his or her specialty or subspecialty. In addition to successfully completing a certification exam with AACN Certification Corporation, nurses seeking clinical certification in acute and/or critical care must meet certain eligibility requirements.

For advanced practice certification, the nurse’s graduate program must meet current standards, including the AACN Master’s Essentials and the National Council of State Boards of Nursing Criteria for APRN Certification. AACN Certification Corporation certifications are granted for a specific period and then must be renewed; the length of the certification period depends on the credential.

Renewal eligibility includes credential-specific requirements such as practice hours, CEs or continuing education recognition points (CERPs), or retaking the exam prior to the certification expiration date.

Accreditation
AACN Certification Corporation certifies registered nurses who care for acutely and critically ill patients. The corporation develops exams according to National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) criteria and applies for NCCA accreditation when an exam becomes eligible (after one year of inception or 500 candidates).

Setting Standards
AACN Certification Corporation contributes to consumer health and safety through comprehensive credentialing of nurses to ensure their practice is consistent with established standards of excellence in caring for acutely and critically ill patients and their families.

References


