



## A POSITION STATEMENT ON THE VALUE OF SPECIALTY NURSING CERTIFICATION

### BACKGROUND

Certification, as defined by the American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS), is the formal recognition of the specialized knowledge, skills, and experience demonstrated by the achievement of standards identified by a nursing specialty to promote optimal health outcomes (1). While state licensure provides the legal authority for an individual to practice professional nursing, private voluntary certification is obtained through individual specialty nursing certifying organizations and reflects achievement of a standard beyond licensure for specialty nursing practice (2). The process of recertification seeks to assure the public that the certificant has maintained a level of knowledge in the specialty, as well as ongoing participation in activities that support the maintenance of competence in that specialty.

Founded in 1991, ABNS is a non-profit organization whose membership is comprised of nursing certification organizations. The Membership Assembly represents nearly half a million certified nurses. The mission of ABNS is *to promote the value of specialty nursing certification to all stakeholders*. All activities and initiatives are designed to achieve the organization's vision – *Specialty nursing certification is **THE** standard by which the public recognizes quality nursing care* (1).

Its "sister" organization, the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification, Inc. accredits specialty nursing certification examination programs signifying that a certifying organization has demonstrated compliance with rigorous standards for certification. This is a testament to the public about the quality of an individual nurse's certification credential(s). As of 1/13/2011, 53 certification programs have met the rigorous standards established by the Board. Accreditation is granted for five years and must be renewed.

ABNS believes that the increasingly complex patient/client needs within the current healthcare delivery system, are best met when registered nurses, certified in specialty practice, provide nursing care.

The first specialty nursing certification program in the United States was established in 1945. According to the 2002 American Association of Critical Care Nurses (AACN) report, "Safeguarding the Patient and the Profession," more than 67 certifying organizations exist representing 134 specialties (3).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive benefits of nursing certification. In 2000, the Nursing Credentialing Research Coalition studied the relationship between certified nurses and patient care quality (4). In 2002, an ABNS survey of nurse managers demonstrated that nearly 90% of respondents clearly prefer hiring certified nurses over non-certified nurses. Furthermore, 58% stated that they see a positive performance difference in certified nurses (5). Additionally, an AACN study in 2002 demonstrated that certification has a significant positive impact on patient care and patient safety (6).

## POSITION

It is the position of ABNS that:

1. Registered nurses should seek certification in their specialty area of practice.
2. Certified nurses should promote their certification by publicly displaying their credentials and introducing themselves as a certified nurse.
3. Healthcare consumers should be knowledgeable of the qualifications and credentials of the registered nurses caring for them.
4. Employers should seek certified nurses for their workforce, support these individuals seeking and maintaining certification, inform patients and the public about the certification status of their workforce, encourage the display of the nurses' certified credentials on identification badges, and market the accomplishments of certified nurses.
5. Specialty nursing certification is an objective measure of knowledge which validates that a nurse is qualified to provide specialized nursing care.

## REFERENCES

1. American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS). (2004). Retrieved September 27, 2004, from <http://www.nursingcertification.org>
2. Niebuhr, B., & Muenzen, P. (2001). A study of perianesthesia nursing practice: The foundation for newly revised CPAN® and CAPA® certification examinations. *Journal of PeriAnesthesia Nursing*, 16(3), 163 – 173.
3. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, AACN Certification Corporation. (2003). Safeguarding the patient and the profession: The value of critical care nurse certification. *American Journal of Critical Care*. 12:154-164.
4. Cary, A.H. (2001). Certified registered nurses: Results of the study of the certified workforce. *American Journal of Nursing*. 101(1), 44-52.
5. Niebuhr, B., & Stromborg, M. (Accepted for publication 2004). Survey of nurse managers: Perceptions of the value of specialty nursing certification. *Nursing Management*.
6. American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN). (2002). New data reveals nurse certification key component of patient safety and recruitment and retention programs (white paper), Aliso Viejo, CA: American Association of Critical-Care Nurses; 2002. Available at [http://www.aacn.org/AACN/mrkt.nsf/Files/PressRelease/\\$file/PressRelease.pdf](http://www.aacn.org/AACN/mrkt.nsf/Files/PressRelease/$file/PressRelease.pdf). Accessed September 27, 2004.

**Approved by the American Board of Nursing Specialties  
March 5, 2005**

**To obtain copies of this ABNS position statement, contact  
Bonnie Niebuhr, MS, RN, CAE, Chief Executive Officer, ABNS  
610 Thornhill Lane, Aurora, OH, 44202 • (330) 995-9172  
Email [abns@nursingcertification.org](mailto:abns@nursingcertification.org) • [www.nursingcertification.org](http://www.nursingcertification.org)**