

# American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) Value of Certification Survey Executive Summary

## Introduction

The American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) was formed in 1991 to create uniformity in nursing certification and to increase public awareness of the value of certification. The mission of ABNS is to “promote the value of specialty nursing certification to all stakeholders.” Key to accomplishing its mission, ABNS has undertaken a focused research agenda to determine the value of certification. Specifically, in response to identified priority research areas, ABNS member organizations chose to undertake a study that would validate nurses’ perceptions, values and behaviors related to certification. In particular, the study sought to address: perceptions of managers on the value of certification, challenges and barriers to certification, benefits and rewards to nurses for being certified, the impact of certification on lost workdays, and the impact of certification on nurse retention. To gather information on these issues, a survey was developed and disseminated to certified nurses, non-certified nurses, and nurse managers.

## Survey Methods

In summer 2004, the ABNS Research Committee developed a draft Value of Certification Survey and survey protocol that was presented to the membership for review and feedback. Central to measuring the value of certification, the survey incorporated the Perceived Value of Certification Tool (PVCT)<sup>1</sup>, a reliable tool that incorporates 18 certification-related value statements. Additional questions that focused on the identified research priorities and demographic items were included. The ABNS Value of Certification Survey was hosted via the Internet by ABNS affiliate member, Professional Examination Service. ABNS applied for and received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this study.

Twenty (83%) of ABNS’ member organizations participated in the survey<sup>2</sup>. Participating organizations were asked to invite up to 100% of their certified nurses and an equal number of non-certified nurses from their practice area of interest to complete the survey. The non-certified nurses could be drawn from lists of affiliated member organizations, potential applicants, or unsuccessful candidates. Many of the ABNS member organizations with large certificant pools chose to sample less than 100% of their certified nurses. These organizations randomly selected a sample of no less than 500 certified and non-certified nurses. In addition to the certified and non-certified samples, each organization was also asked to select a nurse manager sample in equal numbers to the certified/non-certified nurse samples.

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<sup>1</sup> The PVCT was developed, validated and copyrighted by the Competency & Credentialing Institute (formally the Certification Board Perioperative Nursing) in 2000-2001. The PVCT consists of 18 items that utilize a five point Likert scale response, labeled strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, and no opinion.

<sup>2</sup> Participating organizations included: American Academy of Nurse Practitioners, American Association of Nurse Life Care Planners, American Board for Occupational Health Nurses, American Board of Neuroscience Nursing, American Board of Perianesthesia Nursing Certification, Inc., American Legal Nurse Consultant Certification Board, American Nurses Credentialing Center, Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing, Certifying Board of Gastroenterology Nurses and Associates, Competency & Credentialing Institute, Infusion Nurses Certification Corporation, National Board for Certification of Hospice and Palliative Nurses, National Board for Certification of School Nurses, National Certification Board for Diabetes Education, Nephrology Nursing Certification Commission, Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation, Orthopaedic Nurses Certification Board, Pediatric Nursing Certification Board, Rehabilitation Nursing Certification Board, and Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nursing Certification Board.

The participating ABNS organizations contacted their selected sample by email or postcard, using invitation wording developed by ABNS. Each organization was given the study's web address and an organizational passcode for its participant sample to access the survey on line. Before study participants were allowed access to the survey, the tool and web-based access processes were piloted by members of the ABNS Research Committee and two member representatives from each participating organization. The pilot study was conducted during January and February, 2005. The study tool and process were then updated, incorporating pilot participant feedback. On March 22, 2005, a memo was sent to all study participant organizations informing them the survey would be available beginning March 31, 2005. The survey was accessible on-line from March 31, 2005 through June 10, 2005.

### Response Rates

The total sample size for the ABNS Value of Certification Survey was 94,768 nurses, which included certified and non-certified nurses and a subset of nurse managers. From this sample, 11,427 responses were obtained from the on-line survey for a return rate of 12.1%. Of the respondents, 8,615 (75%) identified themselves as certified nurses, and 2,812 (25%) were non-certified nurses. Of these, 1,608 respondents (14%) held the position of Nurse Manager.

### Sample Characteristics

The majority of the study respondents are female (91.6%) and Caucasian (92.1%). Primarily, the nurse respondents are staff nurses (31.8%), nurse managers (14.4%), advanced practice nurses (7.4%) and educators (7.0%). On average, the nurses participating in the study have been practicing for 23 years. The majority (54.1%) work for non-profit organizations; 49.2% work in acute care hospitals. Over half of the nurses (58.7%) earn an annual income ranging from \$50,000 - \$79,999. The highest educational degree held is a Baccalaureate degree (43.4%), Master's degree (21.5%), Associate degree (20.4%), Diploma (13.4%) and Doctorate (1.3%). The certified nurses in the respondent group work, on average, 8.5 years in their specialty before becoming certified. Certification remains a voluntary endeavor for 72.5% of the study's nurses.

### Study Findings

This ABNS study sought to examine five issues:

1. *Perceptions of certified nurses, non-certified nurses and nurse managers on the value of certification* – Using the Perceived Value of Certification Tool (PVCT)<sup>®</sup>, certified and non-certified nurses show a high level of agreement with the value statements on certified practice. Nurse Managers bolster these perceptions with their correspondingly high rate of agreement on the certification value statements. Only one statement - “Certification increases salary” - did not receive overall agreement from the respondents. Low levels of agreement with this value statement were expected as it reflects the findings from previous studies. The following table displays these responses.

<u>Value Statement</u>	<u>Total Respondents</u> (N=11,427) Percent who strongly agree and agree with the value statement	<u>Nurse Managers*</u> (N=1,608) Percent who strongly agree and agree with the value statement
Validates specialized knowledge	97.3%	97.9%
Indicates level of clinical competence	83.5%	85.7%
Indicates attainment of a practice standard	93.5%	94.4%
Enhances professional credibility	95.4%	96.6%

Promotes recognition from peers	88.1%	91.3%
Promotes recognition from other health professionals	84.0%	88.9%
Promotes recognition from employers	77.9%	81.9%
Increases consumer confidence	71.6%	75.6%
Enhances feeling of personal accomplishment	98.0%	98.6%
Enhances personal confidence in clinical abilities	88.2%	91.9%
Provides personal satisfaction	97.3%	98.2%
Provides professional challenge	95.1%	96.8%
Enhances professional autonomy	78.3%	82.9%
Indicates professional growth	95.3%	97.1%
Provides evidence of professional commitment	94.1%	94.9%
Provides evidence of accountability	84.4%	87.4%
Increases marketability	84.8%	87.5%
Increases salary	41.6%	43.6%

\* It is important to note that 77.3% (N=1,243) of nurse manager respondents are certified, potentially increasing the perceived value of certification for manager responses.

2. *Challenges and barriers to certification* – For those nurses who had never been certified, the highest barriers to obtaining certification were: the cost of the exams, lack of institutional rewards and lack of institutional support. For those respondents who let their certification lapse, the most cited reasons were: they no longer practiced in the specialty, there was inadequate or no compensation for certification, and there was inadequate recognition.
3. *Benefits and rewards for being certified* – Nurse respondents noted many incentives that their organizations offer to promote and recognize certification. The top three benefits and rewards include: reimbursing exam fees, displaying certification credential on nametag and/or business card, and reimbursing for continuing education. While some nurse respondents (18.6%) note that their facilities offer an increase in salary for certification, a greater percentage (21.4%) indicate their facilities offer no incentives at all for certification.
4. *Impact of certification on lost workdays* – Survey respondents documented a range of 0 to 35 days absent due to illness over a 12 month period. On average, the number of absences reported was approximately 2 days per year for both certified and non-certified nurses. There was no difference in absences between certified and non-certified nurses.
5. *Impact of certification on nurse retention* – To gauge retention, study participants were asked if they were looking for a new employer, planning on retiring, or had no plans to change jobs. Certified and non-certified nurses responded similarly as seen in the Table below.

Nurse Retention Questions	Certified Nurses	Non-Certified Nurses
I am currently looking for a new employer	13.5%	14.2%
I plan to retire soon.	8.3%	6.7%
I have no plans to make a change.	78.2%	79.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Retention or intent to turnover has been shown to be a complex issue, with many variables that impact on a decision to stay with an employer or seek employment elsewhere. The results from this study do not provide a clear enough picture to determine whether certification status, the benefits and rewards offered by organizations to its certified nurses, or the challenges and barriers organizations present to certification have an impact on nurse retention rates.

### Conclusions

The ABNS Value of Certification Survey results are a valuable examination of nursing certification issues from the perspectives of over 11,000 nurse respondents, across 20 specialty nursing certifications organizations, representing 36 different certification credentials. This study took an important step in furthering our understanding of nursing certification and the implications for health care organizations, nursing certification boards, and certified and non-certified nurses.

- *Health Care Organizations* – Results from the Perceived Value of Certification Tool (PVCT)<sup>®</sup> document a high level of agreement among certified nurses, non-certified nurses and nurse managers that certification is greatly valued among nurses. Yet, nurses continue to face challenges and barriers to obtain and maintain certification. Health care organizations can support nurses by implementing strategies to overcome barriers to certification and offering appropriate incentives and rewards for certification. Nurse Managers clearly support the value of certification and can assume an important role within their organizations to encourage certification. Support of certification is one component of a multifaceted approach designed to retain a satisfied nurse workforce.
- *Specialty Nursing Certification Boards* – This study demonstrates that certification persists as a valuable method for nurses to differentiate themselves in the workplace. Additionally, the results indicate that health care organizations continue to offer certification incentives to attract and retain professional, certified nurses. These points speak well for Specialty Nursing Certification Boards and the important role they play in influencing the future of certified nursing. Therefore, Specialty Nursing Certification Boards are encouraged to develop an agenda that will encourage increased certification among minority nurses, as it is critical that certified nurses be representative of the culturally diverse nursing workforce. And, as this study noted, lack of adequate recognition is a prime reason that nurses are not certified. Certification Boards are uniquely well positioned to implement a variety of strategies that will provide the desired recognition to certified nurses.
- *Nurses* – The results of this survey validate the meaningful value that can be derived from certification. Nurses who currently are not certified are encouraged to identify the barriers holding them back from achieving certification and to develop a plan to overcome these challenges. Certified nurses are asked to serve as role models and partner with professional nursing organizations, Specialty Nursing Certification Boards, and their health care employers to advocate for meaningful incentives and rewards that foster certification.