

Certification in Nephrology Nursing

Certification is defined by the American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) as “the formal recognition of specialized knowledge, skills, and experience demonstrated by achievement of standards identified by a nursing specialty to promote optimal health outcomes” (ABNS, 2012). The American Nurses Association (ANA) defines certification as “the process by which a nongovernmental agency or an association grants recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications. Certification can be used for entry into practice, validation of competence, recognition of excellence, and/or regulation. It can be mandatory or voluntary. Certification validates an individual’s knowledge and skills in a defined role and clinical area of practice, based on predetermined standards” (ANA, 2012).

The American Nephrology Nurses Association (ANNA), in addition to ANA, recognizes nephrology nursing practice as a distinct nursing specialty.

It is the position of ANNA that:

- Certification is an essential component to the internal management of specialty nursing practice.
- Certification assists in protecting the public from unsafe and incompetent caregivers.
- The association will recognize and endorse certification credentials in which:
 - The examination is based on periodic practice analysis surveys.
 - The credentialing body submits to an external peer review process, ensuring the validity and integrity of the certification credential.
- Nursing practice has many levels of experience: novice, advanced beginner, competent, proficient, and expert (Benner, 1984).
- Certification is encouraged for all levels of nephrology nursing practice.

Background and Rationale

ANNA identified certification as an essential component of the model of nephrology nursing specialty practice (Jordan, 1993). ANNA recognized the need for autonomy of the certification body and wrote its first position statement on this topic in 2001. As the professional association for the specialty, ANNA has an inherent interest in the certification of nurses practicing in the specialty. Parker (1998) identified the conferring of a standardized credential as an important means of internal management of specialty nursing practice.

As early as 1979, the ANA acknowledged that the main objective of certification in nursing is to assure that the public receives quality-nursing care and is safe from incompetent caregivers. Other benefits of certification may include quality care and patient satisfaction, professional recognition, financial compensation, career advancement, staff retention, personal growth, self-confidence and professional autonomy (Cary, 2001). Certified nurses also report empowerment and enhanced collaboration with other healthcare professionals (Wade, 2009). A study by Kendall-Gallagher et al. (2011) reinforces the association between nursing expertise and patient outcomes. Wade (2009) describes that the expertise associated with certification improves the quality of patient care.

The need to protect the public demands the credential reflect actual practice while also allowing the public to infer the qualifications of the credentialed provider (Joel, 1989; Styles, 1989). Basing a test's blueprint on periodic assessment of current practice via practice analysis surveys provides confidence that the examination reflects up-to-date practice. Practice analysis supported examinations may test at any level of nursing practice.

The integrity, validity, and reliability of the examination and the entire credentialing process is strengthened by external peer review to set standards for test construction and validity, test administration, candidate eligibility, scoring and recertification (ABNS, 1997). The Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC), formerly the ABNS Accreditation Council, is the only accrediting body specifically for nursing certification. ABSNC accreditation is a peer-review mechanism that allows nursing certification organizations to obtain accreditation by demonstrating compliance with the highest quality standards available in the industry (ABSNC, 2012).

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