

# Increasing Certification Through Unit-Based Education

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Certification has been identified by multiple organizations as an important component and means of elevating the level of nursing care provided to patients and demonstrating to the public that the nursing staff has subspecialty knowledge. Certification may lead to improved patient satisfaction and outcomes as well as increased nurse satisfaction and retention. Despite the known potential benefits associated with certification, institutions struggle to improve certification rates. One possible method to overcome system barriers to certification is the implementation of a unit-based study course to prepare nurses for the Certified Breast Care Nurse (CBCN®) examination. Data collected by an author-developed tool as one institution created and executed a unit-based study course suggest that such an approach increased certification rates and improved disease-specific knowledge and confidence among the staff, despite no official data existing on the tool's reliability and validity. Implementation of similar programs may be successful in improving certification at other institutions seeking to raise certification rates.

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Certification is one means of demonstrating knowledge and commitment to care. Clear benefits to certification exist for nurses, patients, and employers. The current article describes the implementation of a program to increase knowledge of breast cancer care, promote certification of nurses, and prepare those nurses for the examination. Other institutions may be able to follow this model to promote their own certification rates.

## Background

Health care is continually evolving. Institutions and nursing leaders are constantly challenged to recruit and retain competent nurses with subspecialty knowledge and skills. Licensure is based on minimum requirements, whereas certification denotes a recognized higher standard of knowledge and practice (Altman, 2011). Specialty certification at the basic practice level of nursing is a voluntary strategy for validating clinical expertise (Kendall-Gallagher, Aiken, Sloane, & Cimioti, 2011). Certification is one strategy associated with improved patient care and professional

satisfaction because of professional development and employer recognition (Watts, 2010). To be effective, however, certification must be beneficial to all of the stakeholders, including patients, employers, and professional nurses (Brown, Murphy, Norton, Baldwin, & Ponto, 2010).

## Specialty Certification

Numerous benefits have been attributed to specialty certification for patients, employers, and the nursing profession. It serves as one means of formal recognition of advanced achievements within nursing. In the profession of oncology nursing, several types of certification exist not only for general oncology nursing, but for subspecialties within oncology nursing (Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation [ONCC], 2013) (see Table 1).

Benefits to patients and the public potentially include increased patient safety, improved patient outcomes, and promotion of excellence in nursing care (Brown et al., 2010; Coleman et al., 2010; Watts, 2010). Certification validates that the nurse has and can apply scholarly knowledge to clinical practice (Kendall-Gallagher et al., 2011; Niebuhr & Biel, 2007). Healthcare delivery