

A Commitment to Quality and Care: The Importance of Accreditation for Certifying Organizations and Their Members

As the American healthcare sector and its funders, public and private, have refocused on critical patient outcomes in recent years, quality of care has never been more crucial.

As the face of health care to most patients, nurses serve on the front line of this quality movement. Nurses initially see most patients in their treatment, whether on routine visits to their providers or while in the hospital. Non-RN nursing team members also play a key role in patients' ongoing care.

If quality is the watchword, accreditation of nursing certification programs from an independent authority is the industry's—and the public's—guarantee of quality and rigor. It's an industry mark of excellence for consumers.

Our Origin Story

More than 25 years ago, a group of veteran nurses with a special regard for the quality of their care and the reputation of their profession came together to form the American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS).

To protect their patients and the public at large, ABNS founders developed a sophisticated and comprehensive accreditation model to validate specialty nursing certification programs that meet established industry standards of excellence.

The Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC) became the national accrediting body for certification programs for nurses and non-RN nursing team members, assessing specialty certifications against national standards to validate each program's rigor.

ABSNC accredits more than 61% of all nursing certification programs, creating a unified and authoritative voice with regulators, employers, and the public on specialty nursing certification issues. Many states—34¹ at present—accept nursing certification as a proxy for continuing competence.

¹ American Nurses Association©, "States Which Require Continuing Education for RN Licensure," 2013.

Accreditation as a Mark of Excellence

Accredited specialty nursing certification has become an important guidepost for healthcare facilities seeking Magnet™ designation from the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC). Although specialty nursing certification does not factor into present accreditation standards of the Joint Commission, many surveyors have shown increasing interest in the link between the number of certified nurses and facility excellence.

Accreditation, at its core, validates a certifying organization's:

- Autonomy and ethical operations
- Sound governance
- Quality improvement efforts
- Excellence and rigor of certifying programs

Says Karen Nason, executive director, Rehabilitation Nursing Certification Board, "A non-accredited program doesn't necessarily offer the same assurance that the certification is meeting specific criteria and defined standards." Adds Dottie Roberts, executive director of the Orthopaedic Nurses Certification Board and ABSNC accreditation manager, "Accreditation is the obvious extension of individual professional certification. If you are offering a certification program, then you and your certificants need to be able to say, 'our program is the best. We have demonstrated compliance with 18 rigorous standards.' It's a mark of excellence that sets a certification program apart."

If accreditation is important, so too is the reaccreditation process, which helps ensure continued quality of the certifying program. "The process of going through accreditation and reaccreditation means that together, both our organization and reviewers are ensuring that we continue to meet the standards and updating practices to keep the certification current," says Karen Nason.

Healthcare reform, in whatever iteration, will continue to challenge providers to demonstrate excellence if they are to thrive. "That means accreditation will serve providers well as the healthcare environment continues to evolve," says Dottie Roberts.

Accreditation and Certification Work Together to Drive Better Patient Outcomes

An accredited certifying program represents excellence and attainment of the highest quality standards of continuing education and real-world application.

In this consistently evolving industry, continuing education required for specialty certification and relicensure equips professionals to better cope with constant change and continue to provide the highest quality of care for better patient outcomes.

"What we hear from nurses who hold the CEN credential is that both preparing for the exam, and maintaining their certification through the CE process, brings them knowledge and clinical practice improvement," explains Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing's executive director Sandra Samargis.

Perhaps most intriguingly, emerging evidence² now suggests certification may be linked to healthier patients. “While data collection is in its early stages, healthcare organizations are starting to link certification with patient outcomes,” says Dottie Roberts. Roberts, who calls herself a certification advocate, also notes, “Certification is transformational for an organization. It can improve operational efficiency and decrease expense for a healthcare system.”

Accreditation of specialty nursing certification programs has prompted organizations to revisit and reevaluate opportunities for process improvements. Says Sandra Samargis, “The standards applied by ABSNC have prompted BCEN over the years to ensure alignment with these standards. We have a symbiotic relationship with ABSNC. It’s an opportunity for both organizations to work together, evaluate and improve upon what we do.”

Similar to the Good Housekeeping³ seal of approval, accreditation is the third party acknowledgement indicating the certifying program meets national standards of quality and excellence.

The Importance of Accreditation with ABSNC

ABSNC is the only body that deals solely with specialty nursing, and is the only organization committed to affirming nursing and non-RN team members’ certification programs in health care.

Nursing certification programs are accredited by ABSNC through a rigorous peer-review process that allows them to demonstrate compliance with the highest-quality national standards in the industry. Accreditation is more than a certificate—it’s a public commitment to your organization, certificants, and the patients under their care.

So when it comes time to accredit a certification program, it only makes sense to select a partner that understands the profession...because it **is** the profession.

“ABSNC is a community of sharing,” says Karen Nason. “The accreditation and continual reaccreditation of our CRRN program is part of our culture and history. This is a community created through everything we do and we get a lot out of our involvement, beyond the nuts and bolts. It’s continual learning and sharing.”

To Learn More

To learn more about ABSNC accreditation and how to get started, visit nursingcertification.org, or email absnc@nursingcertification.org.

2 “The Value of Certification — Building a Business Case for Certification,” A National Convening, ABNS, March 3-5, 2016. <http://www.nursingcertification.org/resources/documents/research/ABNS-Value-of-Certification-Convening.pdf>

Martin, Lisa C. and Arenas-Montoya, Nina M., “Impact of Nurse Certification Rates on Patient Satisfaction and Outcomes: A Literature Review,” The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing, Volume 46, No 12, © 2015 SLACK Incorporated.

3 Good Housekeeping and the Good Housekeeping Seal are properties of Hearst Communications, Inc.

