



## **American Association of Heart Failure Nurses Position Paper on the Certified Heart Failure Nurse (CHFNP) Certification**

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### **Background:**

Heart failure remains the fastest growing cardiovascular disorder in the U.S. and the most common reason for hospitalization among older adults.<sup>1-4</sup> Nurses are intimately involved with providing care to patients and their families across the continuum of heart failure care and in essentially all healthcare settings. Whether working in an acute care or outpatient facility, participating on a multidisciplinary heart failure disease management team, or, for advanced practice nurses, providing independent management of patients, nurses are in key positions to recognize early signs or symptoms of worsening heart failure, prevent complications, optimize heart failure therapies, evaluate effectiveness of the current plan of care, facilitate communication among multiple care providers and provide patient education. As a specialty organization dedicated to advancing nursing education, clinical practice and nursing research, the American Association of Heart Failure Nurses (AAHFN) is committed to improving outcomes for patients with heart failure.

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.”<sup>5</sup> Specialty and subspecialty certification is a mark of clinical excellence and validates the knowledge and problem solving skills of the test-taker based on the standard. Certification in the subspecialty of heart failure is the formal recognition and validation of achievement of the standards of heart failure nursing care. This designation confirms a basic knowledge about heart failure and exemplifies the commitment to quality care for patients with heart failure. Further, recertification reflects continual learning and adaptation to new or revised evidence related to heart failure assessment, care planning, interventions/treatments, and evaluation of care delivered.

The ABNS establishes and maintains the standards for professional specialty nursing certification and also fulfills a consumer advocate and protection role. In a 2006 survey on the value of certification, over 11,000 nurse respondents, representing 20 specialty organizations, reported a high value for certified practice.<sup>6</sup> Survey respondents, certified and non-certified nurses, nurse managers, and others, perceived that certification may enhance feelings of personal accomplishment and personal satisfaction, enhance professional credibility, and provide evidence of professional commitment. Additionally, there is growing research demonstrating a relationship between nursing certification and improved patient outcomes.<sup>7-10</sup>

### **American Association of Heart Failure Nurses**

Given the high prevalence of heart failure, the many faces of heart failure (preserved vs. reduced left ventricular function, right vs. left ventricular dysfunction, medical, surgical vs. mechanical circulatory support, and congenital vs. other etiologies) and the complex knowledge and skills required to provide optimal care,<sup>11</sup> it is important that standard knowledge is established and measured for nurses caring for these

patients. To that end, when the AAHFN was established in 2004, it began with a mandate and a goal to establish heart failure certification for its members.

The initial strategic plan of the organization included a goal to evaluate the feasibility of developing a certification program. This process involved extensive consultation with experts as well as the establishment of requisite manpower and financial resources. After the Board of Directors' approval to pursue heart failure certification, a Certification Committee was formed, consisting of both staff and advanced practice nurses. This Committee worked with an established psychometrics firm to ensure the delivery of a quality examination. Following the completion of a member-driven job analysis survey, a rigorous examination item-writing process took place. This culminated in the creation of the first Certified Heart Failure Nurse (CHFNF) examination, offered in June 2011.

Subsequently, the AAHFN Certification Board was established and a Core Curriculum Review for the CHFNF examination was written and published.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, CHFNF certification is included on the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) Magnet Program list of certifications. AAHFN developed a plan for recertification to ensure CHFNFs maintain a minimum level of specialty heart failure clinical practice and continuing education, and demonstrate leadership in heart failure through quality improvement activities, publications, or other activities that support the maintenance of competence in heart failure nursing care.<sup>5</sup>

### **Position Statement:**

*It is the position of AAHFN that:*

1. The CHFNF examination is an objective measure of basic requisite knowledge to provide heart failure nursing care.

2. CHFNC recertification encourages continued personal and professional growth in the practice of heart failure nursing.
3. Nurses who achieve CHFNC status should professionally display this credential on name badges and following signatures on official documents.

AAHFNC strongly advocates and encourages nurses caring for patients with heart failure to seek the CHFNC credential, and encourages employers to support nurses in pursuing certification and re-certification.

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