Nurses who care for patients with wounds, ostomies and incontinence are not created equal. Only wound, ostomy and continence (WOC) nurse specialists have completed dedicated WOC education — beyond basic nursing education — with hands-on clinical training and have become certified by the Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nursing Certification Board (WOCNCB®). WOC nurses are the total package. These nurses play important, versatile roles in facilitating and enhancing care for patients suffering from non-healing wounds, ostomies and urinary and fecal incontinence that require both acute and rehabilitative care. Their care garners ongoing praise from patients, and research proves that patients in agencies with WOC nurses, compared to those without WOC nurses, had significantly better outcomes (Westra et al., 2013).

WOC nursing is one of the few specialties recognized by the American Nurses Association (ANA). ANA’s recognition of the scope and standards of practice for WOC nursing as a specialty signifies that WOC nursing adheres to the high standards cultivated by the ANA (WOCN® Society, 2010).

When I had a colostomy earlier this year, I was emotionally devastated and physically inept at changing the pouch. I don’t know what I ever would have done without the expert care and compassion of the very competent WOC nurse.

WOC nurses play a pivotal role in providing optimal patient care in multiple healthcare settings, including inpatient, outpatient, long-term care and home health. Each WOC nurse serves as an educator, consultant, researcher and administrator (WOCN Society-WOCNCB, 2008).

Choose a WOC Nurse

WOC nurses can be educated and certified, and practice in one or more area of wound, ostomy or continence nursing. Both the WOCN Society and the WOCNCB websites allow you to search for a WOC nurse in your area. This directory allows searching of over 2,100 WOCN Society members who have elected to be listed in the nurse referral database; however, membership in the WOCN Society does not guarantee certification. To confirm certification and verify credentials, contact the WOCNCB (www.wocncb.org).

What are the credentials?

Look for the WOCNCB credentials that are awarded based on the successful completion of the rigorous certification process, including:

- CWOCN® Certified Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurse
- CWCM® Certified Wound Care Nurse
- COCN® Certified Ostomy Care Nurse
- CCCN® Certified Continence Care Nurse
- CWON® Certified Wound Ostomy Nurse
- CWOCN-AP® Certified Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurse – Advanced Practice
- CWON-AP® Certified Wound, Ostomy Nurse – Advanced Practice
- CWCN® Certified Wound Care Nurse – Advanced Practice
- COCN-AP® Certified Ostomy Nurse – Advanced Practice
- CCCN-AP® Certified Continence Care Nurse – Advanced Practice
- CFCN® Certified Foot Care Nurse

Numerous wound credentials are currently available with varying requirements. For more information about differences in wound care credentialing programs, please refer to the website for a comparison of wound care certification programs (http://www.wocncb.org).

REFERENCES


WOCN.org is powered by Smith & Nephew. Smith & Nephew is a global medical technology company that offers innovative solutions that advance healing and improve people’s lives. Smith & Nephew’s mission is to continually improve the quality of life for our patients, employees, and communities.

Visit www.smithnephew.com/world (www.smithnephew.com/world) for more information about the company and its products and services.
OSTOMY CARE
WOC nurses provide superior ostomy care. Patients undergoing ostomy surgery require intensive physical and emotional care, as well as continued support, to return to their normal lives. For patients across all settings with fecal and urinary diversions, stoma bags and tubes, WOC nurses provide specialized care with the goals of maximizing independence in self-care and helping patients adapt to the life-altering changes in body image. Specialty care is provided throughout the continuum of care and may include stoma site site inspection, pre- and post-operative management, and education, complex prosthesis fitting, product selection, treatment of perianal skin complications, sexual counseling, dietary counseling and vocational counseling. But care does not stop when a patient is discharged from the hospital. The need for specialty care continues well beyond the immediate post-surgical period. WOC nurses provide long-term support to patients with permanent ostomes through support groups and follow-up care (WOCN Society, 2010).

CONTINENCE CARE
Caring for individuals with urinary and/or fecal incontinence is a billion-dollar industry (WOCN Society, 2010). The prevalence of incontinence is exemplified by the increase in advertising dollars spent promoting the products that treat the conditions. Urinary incontinence affects one out of 10 community-dwelling adults and one of three residents of long-term care facilities (WOCN Society, 2010). Fecal incontinence affects more than two percent of community-dwelling adults and 12 percent or more of extended-care patients (WOCN Society, 2010). The WOCN Society anticipates that the prevalence of continence issues and needs will continue to increase as our population ages.

WOC nurses specializing in continence care help manage patients with incontinence due to muscle or nerve dysfunction, congenital anomalies, infection, surgical, scleroderma, neurologic and psychological disorders. Fortunately, many patients can be cured or will at least experience improvement in their continence with treatment.

BRING A WOC NURSE TO YOUR ORGANIZATION
With experience comes wisdom and expertise. The vast amount of education and preparation required to become a WOC nurse enables each nurse to deliver and coordinate excellent care.

Educators…researchers…decision makers…clinical experts.

WOC nurses are the TOTAL PACKAGE!
There are distinct advantages to employing a WOC nurse who has met the rigorous requirements to complete a WOCNEP and obtain a WOCNCB certification. WOC nurses use expert clinical skills, facilitate cost containment, drive revenue and ensure regulatory compliance, in addition to improving patient care through advocacy, patient/family education, research and the achievement of specific outcomes (WOCN Society, 2010). These achievements are accomplished through a variety of activities including:

» Providing state-of-the-art care and expertise
» Developing protocols for cost-effective resource utilization
» Preventing complications and reducing readmissions
» Improving the continuity and coordination of care across settings

We profoundly appreciate the expertise and effort our WOC nurse extends to our patients. This is a much-needed skill that many facilities lack.

As one who found himself facing health issues and life-altering changes that needed careful consideration, when I needed calm reassurance and knowledgeable and caring support, that support came in the form of two wonderful WOC nurses. Because of them, living with a stoma is as natural as my life was prior to my surgery.

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