Position Statement

CREDENTAILS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL NURSE:
DETERMINING A STANDARD ORDER OF CREDENTIALS FOR THE PROFESSIONAL NURSE

Effective Date: December 11, 2009
Status: New Position Statement
Originated By: Congress on Nursing Practice and Economics
Adopted By: ANA Board of Directors

Purpose: The purpose of this statement is to clarify and solidify the American Nurses Association (ANA) recommendation regarding the order of credentials with professional entitlement. Furthermore, this position statement intends to promote widespread understanding of credentialing mechanisms for consumers of nursing services, and the impact such endorsements have on the professional nurse (Kozier, 1997).

Statement of the ANA position: In the nursing profession, the use of credentials is an essential component to designate levels of attained education and licensure, certification, and professional achievement. The listing of credentials when identifying a nurse ensures credibility and competence to the consumers of nursing care. Standardized use strengthens a unified understanding of credentials among nurses, within the healthcare delivery system, and for healthcare consumers. In an effort to establish a recognizable and understandable credential usage process across all spectrums of nursing, the following order of credentials is recommended: Highest earned degree, mandated requirements (i.e. licensure), state designations or requirements, national certifications, awards and honors, other certifications.

History/previous position statements: This is the first statement of the ANA on this issue.
Supportive Material: There has been very little written in the professional literature that discusses placement order of credentials and subsequent application in various settings. In 2002 and revised in 2008, Smolenski published a brief expert opinion paper outlining the various types of credentials available. In these documents, Smolenski outlined a proposed order of credentials, suggesting that the highest nursing degree attained be listed first, followed by licensure(s), state designation or requirement(s), national certification(s), awards or honors and then other certifications.

The American Academy of Nursing (AAN) Credential Use Guideline (2009) suggests that the rules for credential use are to provide the name of the nurse followed by a comma, then the highest degree earned, followed by license entitlement, then if applicable, fellowship (AAN, 2009).

The following definitions from the Consensus model for APRN Regulation: Licensure, Accreditation, Certification & Education can assist in clarifying terms frequently used in the process of titling as used in this position statement:

**Licensure.** The process by which an agency of government grants permission to an individual to engage in a given occupation upon finding that the applicant has attained the minimum level of competency necessary to ensure that the public health, safety, and welfare will be reasonably protected (APRN Consensus Work Group and the National Council of State Boards of Nursing APRN Advisory Committee, 2008).

**Accreditation.** The process by which educational institutions or programs of study are evaluated or subsequently recognized as meeting certain predetermined criteria or standards. This can be applied to educational degree or certification programs in nursing or nursing-related areas (APRN Consensus Work Group and the National Council of State Boards of Nursing APRN Advisory Committee, 2008).

**Credentialing.** The process by which individuals or institutions, or one or more of their programs, are recognized and designated by the qualified agent as having met a minimum standards at a specific time (APRN Consensus...
Work Group and the National Council of State Boards of Nursing APRN Advisory Committee, 2008).

**Educational degree.** The formal preparation of registered nurses and advanced practice registered nurses in degree-granting programs or post-certificate programs (APRN Consensus Work Group and the National Council of State Boards of Nursing APRN Advisory Committee, 2008).

The order of use of credentials thus far has been guided by state-specific requirements, which are not equivalent across the nation. Academia and the publishing industry have been two avenues that have inconsistently guided entitlement order. (Zych, J., 2002; Fondiller, S., Nerone, B., 1993; U.S. Government, 2000).

**Assumptions:** The following lists assumptions of the state of nursing credentials as well as reasons this position statement was deemed necessary.

- State licensure is mandatory for practicing professional nurses.
- Professional nursing is defined by state law and professional organizations, such as the ANA.
- Professional certification is voluntary and nongovernmental except as defined by state regulation in accordance with scope of practice.
- Increased variety of credentials exist among nursing specialties related to various educational and certification opportunities.
- The language of nursing credentials with the use of multiple acronyms after the name of the provider can be distracting and confusing to the consumers of nursing care.
- Lack of supportive documentation of any particular order to list credentials has spawned multiple approaches.
Recommendations:

- Degree credentials are awarded after the completion of an educational program e.g. AS, BS, MS, PhD, EdD (AMA, 1998).

- Licensure is based on completion of specified educational program and successful passing of a national licensure exam e.g. RN, LPN (Smolenski, 2008).

- State designations or requirements are credentials that designate authority and recognition to practice at an advanced level. The specific titles are state specific. Examples of these designations or requirements include APN, ARNP, APRN, CRNP, NP, CNS, and CS (Smolenski, 2008; Miller, 1999; Zych, 2002).

- National certification is awarded by nationally recognized accredited certifying bodies and includes recognition of continued education in specified area of practice or professional advancement. Examples of these certifications credentials include RN, C, RNBC, BS-CAE, CWOCN, and CCRN.

- Awards and honors are recognition of outstanding service or accomplishments. Examples include FAAN or FCCN (Smolenski, 2008).

- Other certifications are those not associated with the profession of nursing or with licensure.

The following order of credentials should be utilized to ensure consistency and professionalism across nursing settings:

- Education (List highest attained degree first)
- Licensure (state designation or requirement)
- National certification
- Awards and honors
- Other certifications
The credentials should be listed as capital letters without periods between letters, but with a comma between each credential.

Examples of the correct order of credentials:

   Mary B. Smith MSN, RN, APRN, CWOCN
   Mary B. Smith PHD, RN, APRN, CCN, FAAN
   Mary B. Smith BSN, RN, CCRN

**Summary:** A standardized order of credentials listing a nurse’s education, licensure, and certifications is essential in order to establish consistency in for the profession and to effectively communicate to colleagues and consumers.

**References**


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