OREGON NURSES ASSOCIATION
ACTION REPORT

Strategies to Encourage Professional Specialty Certification among Licensed Oregon Nursing Professionals

Submitted by:
Cabinet on Education and
Cabinet on Economic and General Welfare

Recommended Actions:

ONA leaders, structural units and program areas:

- Develop and test a mechanism for collecting annual data on national certification of ONA members;
- Cosponsor certification fairs in collaboration with other groups;
- Disseminate notice of (advertise) conferences, workshops, certification review seminars and regional nursing specialty or ANCC sponsored study groups to prepare or renew nursing/specialty certification;
- EGW Cabinet and collective bargaining units develop and/or enforce contract language that obligates employers to provide professional acknowledgement, recognition and financial support of certified nurses in hospitals and health care systems.;
- Professional Nursing Care Committees disseminate information related to nursing/specialty certification;
- Professional Services Program Area disseminates the growing body of evidence supporting the benefits of nursing/specialty certification and rates of certification of members within ONA.

ONA members:

- Request reimbursement and recognition of the employer for achievement of national nursing/specialty certification;
- Request employer ensure that the certification credential be printed on workplace identification badges,

Background and Rationale:

Oregon Nurses Association, the professional association for nurses, has an obligation to support mechanisms that recognize nurses for their knowledge, competency and expertise in various roles and specialties. This action report urges ONA to adopt a comprehensive position regarding the nursing and specialty certification of nurses. It proposes actions of ONA leadership, ONA’s structural units and program areas, and ONA members.

The American public is increasingly aware of the important role of the nurse in providing patient care. They are holding nurses accountable for care delivered in the hospital and as well as their overall health outcomes. Many Americans are demanding of nurses “How do I know that you are competent?” Certification is a method to continue professional growth and development, increase professional levels of compensation, enlarge professional opportunities for advancement, and to increase opportunities to qualify for advanced nursing education. Raising the bar of competency at the level of the individual practicing nurse serves to raise the bar of competency of the profession as a whole.

“The Future of Nursing: Leading Change and Advancing Health,” is a recently released Institute of Medicine report which outlines a blueprint for professional nursing in the future (IOM, 2010). The authors of this report state that the nursing profession “must adopt a framework of continuous lifelong learning that includes basic nursing education … and continuing competence.”
Professional nursing certification is an accepted method for nurses to demonstrate a nationally accepted standard of professional competence and skill. Finally, the IOM report recommends that timelines for the reassessment of nursing skills and competencies and professional development be accelerated and occur more frequently (IOM, 2010).

In light of these realities for the profession, the ONA Cabinet on Education recommends that the ONA House of Delegates support strategies to encourage professional certification among licensed Oregon nursing professionals. For the purposes of this action report professional certification is defined as:

“A voluntary process by which a non-governmental body grants time-limited recognition and use of a credential to individuals who have demonstrated that they have met predetermined and standardized criteria for required knowledge, skills, or competencies. To retain the credential, certificants must meet requirements for renewal. The credential awarded by the certifier denotes that the participant possesses particular knowledge, skills, or competencies....Moreover, the assessment conducted by a certification program is independent of a specific class, course, or other education/training program and also independent of any provider of classes, courses, or programs ...and the certifier is NOT the sole provider of any education or training that may be required for certification.”


Professional certification is distinguished from an “assessment-based certificate program” which is defined as:

“The provision of education/training, with assessment(s) being used to confirm that participants have achieved the intended learning outcomes of a specific class, course, or other education/training program or event...and the certifier is the sole provider of any education or training that may be required for the assessment-based certificate.”


Examples of “assessment-based certificate programs” include Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS) and Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS).

Evidence of benefits of professional nursing certification for nurses, patients, hospitals and health care systems:

The evidence in support of certification has been mounting over the past ten years. Several recent studies have identified a range of benefits. These advantages include the following, 1) benefits to nurses themselves, (American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS), 2006; Wade, 2009 ),2) benefits to the health care team,(ABNS, 2006; Wade, 2009),3) improved patient outcomes (Stromberg 2005; Coleman , Coon , and Lockhart , 2009), and 4) benefits to hospitals and health care systems (ABNS, 2006; Zulkowski, Ayello, and Wexler 2007; Kendall-Gallagher, Blegen , 2009; Wade, 2009; Coleman, Coon, and Lockhart ,2009). Professional certification in nursing began about thirty-five years ago. Since that time a growing number of nurses representing a variety of nursing specialty areas have chosen to become certified. According to Wade (2009) as of 2008, the four most frequently conferred specialty nursing certifications were: 1) the American Association of Critical Care Nurses’ (AACN) registered nurse (CCRN – approximately 40,000 certifications), 2) the Competency & Credentialing Institute, (CNOR – about 30,000 certified nurses), 3) the Oncology Nursing Society, (OCN - 22,825 certificates conferred),
Intrinsic benefits to nurses:
A recent article (Wade, 2009), which reviewed the literature related to nurse certification over the past twenty years identified several benefit categories of certification. First and foremost, the major beneficiary of specialty nurse certification is the certified nurse herself/himself. This benefit includes enhanced clinical nursing competence and expertise (ABNS, 2006; Wade, 2009). This practice benefit translates into nurses “feeling more skilled and competent,” as they perform their duties (Wade, 2009). Certification is also associated with improved nurse job satisfaction (ABNS, 2006; Wade, 2009). Additional major intrinsic benefits identified by nurse respondents included; “enhances feeling of personal accomplishment, provides personal satisfaction, provides professional challenge, enhances professional credibility, and provides evidence of professional commitment” (ABNS, 2006).

Benefits to the health care team:
Certification research identifies a benefit of nurse certification to the health care team. Nurses’ report certification enhances cooperation and communication among nursing co-workers and improves collaborative relationships with physician colleagues (Wade, 2009). Major extrinsic benefits identified included; “promotes recognition from peers, increases marketability, and promotes recognition from other health professionals” (ABNS, 2006).

Benefits to hospitals and health systems:
The major benefits of nurse certification to hospitals and health systems include improved quality of care delivered, commitment to the profession and improved patient safety (Stromberg, 2005; Kendall-Gallagher, and Blegen; Wade, 2009). There is clear evidence that the percent of the nursing workforce that has obtained specialty certification is consistently cited as a component of exceptional professional work environments e.g. ANCC Magnet Recognition®, the AACN Beacon Award, and the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. In addition, certification also helps with Joint Commission accreditation and grant funding (Stromberg, 2005).

Barriers to nurses obtaining certification
Despite the strong evidence in support of the multi-faceted benefits of professional nursing certification relatively few nurses actually obtain this credential (Wade, 2009) The top three methods of nursing specialty certification recognition by employers that were reported in the ABNS study were: 1) reimbursement for examination fees; 2) listing certification credential(s) on nametag and/or business card; and 3) reimbursement for continuing education (ABNS, 2006). Eighteen percent of study participants in the ABNS study reported that their facilities offer an increase in salary for certification (ABNS, 2006). Anecdotal estimates of the rates of nursing certification in Oregon hospitals and health systems among non-Magnet facilities are approximately 25% of the nursing workforce are certified (Oregon Nurses Association, 2010). The primary barriers to certification which have been identified include, 1) out of pocket costs for the examination and the course work to prepare for the examination, 2) delay and barriers to reimbursement of out of pocket expenses related to certification, 3) inability to Schedule the necessary time off to obtain certification, 4) lack of institutional support, and lack of access to preparation courses or materials, (ABNS, 2006). This action report is designed to reduce the impact of some or all of these barriers and thereby encourage professional specialty certification among licensed Oregon nursing professionals.

Financial impact:
The action report activities are currently covered by staff and budgets of all ONA program areas including Professional Services and in the budget allocations of the ONA Cabinet on Education and the ONA Cabinet on Economic and General Welfare.
Bibliography:


