

# Relationships Between Certification and Job Perceptions of Oncology Nurses

Linda C. Hughes, PhD, RN, Sandra Ward, PhD, RN, FAAN, Cecelia Gatson Grindel, PhD, RN, Elizabeth Ann Coleman, PhD, RNP, AOCN®, Donna L. Berry, PhD, RN, AOCN®, Pamela S. Hinds, PhD, RN, CS, Denise M. Oleske, PhD, RN, Cynthia Miller Murphy, RN, MSN, CAE, and Marilyn Frank-Stromborg, EdD, JD, FAAN

**Purpose/Objectives:** To explore relationships between oncology nursing certification and oncology nurses' job perceptions.

**Design:** Descriptive, correlational.

**Setting:** Questionnaire mailed to homes of Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) members.

**Sample:** 703 certified and 514 noncertified ONS members (N = 1,217; 50% response rate).

**Methods:** Data were collected using survey methods and grouped by respondents' certification status for statistical analysis.

**Main Research Variables:** Certification, group cohesion, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction.

**Findings:** Certification was weakly correlated with cohesion, commitment, and satisfaction. Work setting, rather than certification, accounted for differences in job perceptions. Job perceptions were most positive in settings characterized by a high percentage of patients with cancer (> 75%), a high percentage of RNs ( $\geq 80\%$ ), and monetary support for continuing education.

**Conclusions:** The hypothesis that oncology nurses' certification status is associated with job perceptions that are valued by employers was not supported.

**Implications for Nursing Practice:** Nurses' job perceptions have been linked to control over nursing practice and participation in organizational and clinical decision making. Managerial strategies that empower certified nurses to practice with more autonomy and participate in decisions that affect patient care should be emphasized.

Access to competent providers has emerged as a key issue in debates about healthcare quality. Concern about this issue has prompted intense scrutiny of approaches used to regulate the healthcare work force (Finocchio, Dower, McMahon, Gragnola, and the Taskforce on Health Care Workforce Regulation, 1995). Public support is growing for a standard of accountability that is based on periodic external validation of practice competencies (Swankin, 1995). Most health-related disciplines use specialty certification for postentry-level credentialing. As such, emphasis on these

## Key Points . . .

- ▶ Little research exists to support meaningful inferences about the value of specialty-nursing certification.
- ▶ Job perceptions of oncology nurses were positive and did not differ on the basis of certification status.
- ▶ Studies that target variables like control over nursing practice, participation in decision making, and support for decision-making autonomy and discretion are needed to identify the effect of certification on variables that influence the way nurses practice.

*Linda C. Hughes, PhD, RN, is an associate professor in the School of Nursing at the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston; Sandra Ward, PhD, RN, FAAN, is a professor in the School of Nursing at the University of Wisconsin in Madison; Cecelia Gatson Grindel, PhD, RN, is an assistant professor in the School of Nursing at Georgia State University in Atlanta; Elizabeth Ann Coleman, PhD, RNP, AOCN®, is a professor in the College of Nursing at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences in Little Rock; Donna L. Berry, PhD, RN, AOCN®, is a research associate professor in the School of Nursing at the University of Washington in Seattle; Pamela S. Hinds, PhD, RN, CS, is the coordinator of nursing research at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, TN; Denise M. Oleske, PhD, RN, is an associate professor in the departments of Health Systems Management and Preventive Medicine at Rush University in Chicago, IL; Cynthia Miller Murphy, RN, MSN, CAE, is the executive director of the Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation (ONCC) in Pittsburgh, PA; and Marilyn Frank-Stromborg, EdD, JD, FAAN, is a presidential research professor and chair of the School of Nursing at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb. Data were generated from a survey of Oncology Nursing Society members conducted by the ONCC Research Committee. Frank-Stromborg is the chair of the ONCC Research Committee. Berry, Hinds, and Oleske were original committee members. Remaining authors are current ONCC Research Team members. ONCC funded this study. (Submitted December 1999. Accepted for publication July 3, 2000.)*