

Oncology Certification for Nurses

Because of rapid scientific and technologic advances in cancer care, nurses must maintain current and highly specialized knowledge to provide quality care. Oncology nursing certification provides validation of the specialized knowledge and experience required for competent performance.

The American Board of Nursing Specialties (2009, 2012) defined nursing certification as the formal recognition of the specialized knowledge, skills, and experience demonstrated by the achievement of standards identified by a nursing specialty to promote optimal patient care. The Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation (ONCC) develops and administers certification programs that provide tangible evidence that nurses have the knowledge required to effectively provide care to patients experiencing the complex problems associated with a diagnosis of cancer throughout the disease continuum.

ONCC is an independent organization that is affiliated closely with the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) and the Association of Pediatric Hematology Oncology Nurses. ONS founded ONCC in 1984, recognizing that public protection is a goal of professional certification (Nielsen et al., 1996). ONCC certification programs are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies and/or the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification. These independent accrediting bodies have established nationally acknowledged standards and criteria for the recognition of certification programs and use rigorous processes to determine whether programs meet their standards. ONCC certifications are validated through empirical data attained from role delineation studies conducted periodically for each certification program (Fabrey & Breidenbach, 2008, Fabrey, Cline, & Breidenbach, 2009a, 2009b; Fabrey & Irwin, 2012a, 2012b).

ONCC offers the following certifications: oncology certified nurse (OCN[®]), certified pediatric oncology nurse (CPON[®]), certified pediatric hematology/oncology certified nurse (CPHON[®]), advanced oncology certified nurse (AOCN[®]), advanced oncology certified nurse practitioner (AOCNP[®]), advanced oncology clinical nurse specialist (AOCNS[®]), certified breast care nurse (CBCN[®]), and blood and marrow certified nurse (BMTCN).

It is the position of ONS that

- Oncology nursing certification provided by ONCC is sound and beneficial to patients and society at large. ONS encourages oncology nurses to become certified.
- ONCC certification programs are rigorous and meet nationally recognized standards that are reliable and legally defensible measurements of oncology nursing knowledge.
- Regardless of the healthcare setting, certification benefits patients and their families, nurses, and employers. Oncology nursing certification validates that nurses have met stringent requirements for knowledge and experience and are qualified to provide competent oncology care.
- Employers demonstrate their commitment to providing the highest quality of care to patients with cancer throughout the health and illness continuum by hiring certified nurses, supporting nurses in attaining and maintaining certification, rewarding nurses who become certified, and informing patients and the public about the certification status of their nursing staff. Healthcare consumers have a right to know the qualifications of those responsible for their care. Nurses should inform patients of their certification and explain its meaning. Certified nurses should display their credentials on their name badges, and employers should support such display.

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Statement Type

Education, Certification, and Role Delineation

References

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