



Oncology Nursing Society

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Oncology Certification for Nurses

Joint Position Statement From the Oncology Nursing Society and the Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation

Because of rapid scientific and technologic advances in cancer care, nurses must maintain current and highly specialized knowledge to provide safe, high-quality care. Continuing professional development and earning specialty nursing certification are important considerations to maintain pace with the rapid advances in cancer care.

Oncology nurses are encouraged to participate in nursing continuing professional development (NCPD) activities offered by accredited providers. Nurses may opt to participate in assessment-based certificate courses, which aid in acquiring skills, knowledge, and competencies related to a specialized scope of content (for example, the Oncology Nursing Society [ONS]/Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation [ONCC] Chemotherapy Immunotherapy Certificate Course). This course and other certificate courses award a certificate of added qualification and NCPD contact hours, indicating that the participant has successfully demonstrated specialized knowledge and skills in a specific content area. In addition to participation in educational activities and certificate courses that offer NCPD, oncology nurses should aspire to earn specialty nursing certification. The American Board of Nursing Specialties (2020) defines 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 health outcomes.”

Oncology nursing certification evaluates the mastery of knowledge and skills inclusive of a broad scope of content and provides validation of the specialized knowledge and experience required for competent performance. Certification promotes professionalism and demonstrates commitment and accountability to professional growth and development (Halm, 2021). ONCC develops and administers validated, data-driven certification programs that identify nurses who 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 offers certifications for oncology nurse generalists, oncology nurse practitioners, pediatric hematology-oncology nurses, and nurses specializing in the care of patients with breast cancer or caring for patients undergoing blood or marrow transplantation. Oncology nursing certification speaks to nursing knowledge of the care continuum, oncology nursing practice, treatment modalities, symptom management, oncologic emergencies, and psychosocial dimensions of care.

ONCC is an independent organization that is affiliated closely with ONS and the Association of Pediatric Hematology/Oncology Nurses. ONCC certification programs are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies. This independent accrediting body has established nationally acknowledged standards and criteria for the recognition of certification

programs and uses 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.

It is the position of ONS and ONCC that:

- Oncology nursing certification is beneficial to patients and society at large.
- Oncology nurses will work toward, achieve, and maintain certification.
- Accredited 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 will 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, recognizing 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 will inform patients of their certification and explain its meaning. Certified nurses will display their credentials on their name badges, and employers will support such display.

Approved by the ONS Board of Directors February 2004; revised May 2006, January 2009; reviewed February 2012, January 2013, January 2014, January 2015, October 2017, March 2019, March 2022.

References

- American Board of Nursing Specialties. (2020). About us.
<http://www.nursingcertification.org/About-ABNS>
- Halm, M.A. (2021). Specialty certification: A path to improving outcomes. *American Journal of Critical Care*, 30(2), 156–160. <https://doi.org/10.4037/ajcc2021569>