

The Value of Becoming Certified in Care Coordination and Transition Management: Optimizing Outcomes by Optimizing the Role of the Nurse

The Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board (MSNCB) is a professional organization whose mission is to validate excellence in medical-surgical nursing. MSNCB administers the Certified Medical-Surgical Registered Nurse (CMSRN®) and Certified in Care Coordination and Transition Management (CCCTM) certification programs because certification is the recognized path for registered nurses to build and demonstrate commitment, confidence, and credibility. Certification provides an added credential beyond licensure. It demonstrates, by examination, that the registered nurse adheres to specialized nursing standards and has acquired a core body of specialized knowledge in their practice or specialty. For more information about MSNCB, visit www.msncb.org.

Nursing specialty certification accords the recipient a sense of empowerment and validation; it demonstrates the holder's clinical competence and commitment to the profession (Fitzpatrick, Campo, & Gacki-Smith, 2014; Niebuhr & Biel, 2007). With this in mind, in the spring of 2014 the Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board (MSNCB) and the American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing (AAACN) explored creation of a certification examination for care coordination and transition management. Key stakeholders for this proposition were identified as nurses working in ambulatory care, home health, telehealth, patient-centered medical homes, and care coordination departments in various settings. The response from these stakeholders was overwhelmingly positive. The need to define and elevate the role of nurses working in care coordination and transition management was seen as crucial, and long overdue. While many organizations have begun to recognize this role formally, none has articulated it better than the AAACN with publication of the *Care Coordination and Transition Management Core Curriculum* (Haas, Swan, & Haynes, 2014). This publication served as the foundation for the Care Coordination and Transition Management (CCTM®) certification exam.

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A year later, the first CCTM certification examination was launched. Since that time, over 100 nurses have achieved the credential of Certified in Care Coordination and Transition Management (CCCTM). Four newly certified CCCTM nurses were selected to be interviewed about the certification process for this article, and describe how this certification serves them professionally: Michelle Card, BSN, RN-BC, CCCTM (Cleveland Clinic, OH); Luke Emerson, BSN, RN, CCCTM (Kootenai Health, ID); Vonda Mayfield, BBA, RN-C, CDE, CCCTM (Charlton Methodist Hospital, TX); and Laura McKenna, MBA, MHA, BSN, RN, CCCTM (UT Health, TX).

A Responsibility to Patients and Colleagues

Common themes were evident immediately among the four respondents. Each saw certification in CCTM as a responsibility to patients and colleagues. Michelle Card illustrated this with an account of an interaction she had with a patient who was transitioning to another

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Preparing for Certification

setting. The patient asked, "What makes you qualified to do this?" Michelle confidently explained her CCCTM credential to the patient, its relation to her work, and how the knowledge associated with being a CCCTM nurse enables her to ensure smooth care transitions for patients.

Laura McKenna echoed that sentiment when she said the course material was the "...best evidence-based guidance for my practice...it's perfect for what we're doing because this is exactly what we *are* doing." The doctors and patients touched by the Transition of Care program "really needed this," says Laura. "Patients feel the value and are so appreciative."

The interviewed CCCTM nurses also reflected on the effect certification and AAACN's *CCTM Core Curriculum* have had on professional practice within their organizations. The Cleveland Clinic acknowledged the importance of CCTM and has created the role of Manager of Care Coordination, with Michelle Card at the helm. Vonda Mayfield has been tasked with designing and promoting a Transitional Care Program for family medicine residents at Charlton Methodist Hospital. Luke Emerson says concepts gleaned from the *Core Curriculum* were "...foundational in building our Trauma Clinical Navigator program for Kootenai Health's American College of Surgeons verified Level III Trauma Center. Now that I am the first registered nurse to have my CCTM certification for the state of Idaho, I am able to properly advise and provide input for other transition programs in our hospital and surrounding hospitals." Laura McKenna used the AAACN *CCTM Core Curriculum* as well as the AAACN *Scope and Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses in Care Coordination and Transition Management* (2016) to develop policies, procedures, and job descriptions for the Transition of Care program she manages at the University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston.

Improved Communication

Since becoming CCCTM nurses, Michelle, Luke, Vonda, and Laura maintain their ability to communicate across settings has improved. This ability to communicate is amplified by organizational practice that incorporates the fundamentals of the *CCTM Core Curriculum*. As a result, these CCCTM nurses detect subtle changes in patients' condition, and are able to be proactive and effect better outcomes for patients and the facility. For instance, Michelle described enhanced collegiality across care settings. Vonda has established a relationship with her hospital's Emergency Department that ensures she will be notified swiftly when a patient with diabetes presents and needs intervention. Luke is seeing growth in patient self-management as patients move across settings. Laura said with the *CCTM Core Curriculum* supporting them, "...our nurses are prepared to do the work of CCTM just by the practical day-to-day work they do and by our operational standards."

The materials on the AAACN and MSNCB website were a great resource for the four CCCTM nurses who participated in this discussion. The practice questions, online modules, and *CCTM Core Curriculum* were of tremendous use in preparing for the exam. They all agreed the exam was well constructed and an accurate reflection of the activities of CCTM nurses.

Personal and Public Validation

Care coordination and transition management continue to be an important topic in health care and an essential skill for nursing. The need for expertise in CCTM only will intensify in the future. The increasing diversity of healthcare settings results in complex care transitions, with a heightened expectation among care providers and organizational leaders that patients should self-manage complicated and chronic illnesses. Nurses are able to support patients and families, and collaborate with an interprofessional team to achieve desired outcomes for all parties. The competencies in AAACN's *CCTM Core Curriculum* prepare nurses specifically for that role; certification in care coordination and transition management serves as personal and public validation that those competencies have been met. **MSN**

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