

**ABNS**  
**American Board of Nursing Specialties**  
*Promoting Excellence in Nursing Certification*

A POSITION STATEMENT ON THE VALUE OF SPECIALTY NURSING CERTIFICATION

**BACKGROUND**

Certification, as defined by the American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS), is 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 (1). While state licensure provides the legal authority for an individual to practice professional nursing, private voluntary certification is obtained through individual specialty nursing certifying organizations and reflects achievement of a standard beyond licensure for specialty nursing practice (2). The process of recertification seeks to assure the public that the certificant has maintained a level of knowledge in the specialty, as well as ongoing participation in activities that support the maintenance of competence in that specialty.

Founded in 1991, ABNS is a non-profit organization with two arms – a Membership Assembly and an Accreditation Council. The Membership Assembly represents nearly half a million certified nurses. The mission of ABNS is *to promote the value of specialty nursing certification to all stakeholders*. All activities and initiatives are designed to achieve the organization’s vision – *Specialty nursing certification is THE standard by which the public recognizes quality nursing care* (1).

The ABNS Accreditation Council accredits specialty nursing certification examination programs signifying that a certifying organization has demonstrated compliance with rigorous standards for certification. This is a testament to the public about the quality of an individual nurse's certification credential(s). To date, 39 certification examination programs have met the rigorous standards established by the Council. Accreditation is granted for five years and must be renewed.

ABNS believes that the increasingly complex patient/client needs within the current healthcare delivery system, are best met when registered nurses, certified in specialty practice, provide nursing care.

The first specialty nursing certification program in the United States was established in 1945. According to the 2002 American Association of Critical Care Nurses (AACN) report, “Safeguarding the Patient and the Profession,” more than 67 certifying organizations exist representing 134 specialties (3).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive benefits of nursing certification. In 2000, the Nursing Credentialing Research Coalition studied the relationship between certified nurses and patient care quality (4). In 2002, an ABNS survey of nurse managers demonstrated that nearly 90% of respondents clearly prefer hiring certified nurses over non-certified nurses. Furthermore, 58% stated that they see a positive performance difference in certified nurses (5). Additionally, an AACN study in 2002 demonstrated that certification has a significant positive impact on patient care and patient safety (6).

**POSITION**

It is the position of ABNS that:

1. Registered nurses should seek certification in their specialty area of practice.
2. Certified nurses should promote their certification by publicly displaying their credentials and introducing themselves as a certified nurse.
3. Healthcare consumers should be knowledgeable of the qualifications and credentials of the registered nurses caring for them.
4. Employers should seek certified nurses for their workforce, support these individuals seeking and maintaining certification, inform patients and the public about the certification status of their workforce, encourage the display of the nurses’ certified credentials on identification badges, and market the accomplishments of certified nurses.

5. Specialty nursing certification is an objective measure of knowledge which validates that a nurse is qualified to provide specialized nursing care.

## REFERENCES

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