

# A Profile of Certification for Pediatric Nurses

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Over the past 15 years, more than 5,000 nurses have earned specialty nursing certification in pediatrics. While approximately 68% of these nurses have maintained this certification, many have allowed their certification to lapse. Surveys were conducted to describe differences between these two groups.

Certification is a voluntary process by which an individual demonstrates specialized knowledge and skills in a professional practice field. Earned certification means that an individual has met a specified quality standard that usually reflects nationally accepted practice principles and values. As our society seeks to identify and employ specialists in all professional fields, earned certification has helped individuals publicly proclaim their practice competency to employers and consumers. Today, certification has become the hallmark credential for professionals in a variety of industries including information technology. The Microsoft certified professional and the certified automobile mechanic both represent specialists that have met rigorous national standards. With the knowledge explosion and the growth of multiple educational programs, "certification" is now recognized by many industries as a measure of specialized knowledge and serves as a benchmark for hiring and promoting (Microsoft, 2003; Lubecouncil, 2003).

Professional certification uses a formal process to grant a certification credential that requires an individual to meet education, practice, and experience requirements and successfully complete a comprehensive examination to assess knowledge and skills in the specialty. The certification process provides assurance that those certified meet established standards and a minimum level of competence. Once the initial certification credential has been earned, continuous recertification or certification maintenance is required to promote ongoing competency. Through a systematic plan

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This column provides information and explore credentialing issues of interest to the pediatric nurse professional. Content and creativity is emphasized and efforts made to include opinion profiles from employers and practicing nurses, as well as analytical data describing professional issues facing today's pediatric nurse. For information contact Janet Wyatt PhD, RN, CRNP - Section Editor

of learning and continuing education, participation in a recertification program helps to assure the public that the certified individual is engaged in activities designed to update specialized knowledge and skills.

For more than 25 years, professional nursing practice has recognized the process of certification as a valid quality mechanism to verify nurses' knowledge and skills in a specialty practice area. Initially developed to recognize "excellence" in a specialty area, certification, particularly in those specialty practice fields designated as advanced nursing practice (nurse practitioners, nurses anesthetists, and others), has also been recognized by many of the state boards of nursing as a regulatory requirement for achievement of advanced nursing licensure. While advanced practice nursing certification has been recognized as a requirement for advanced practice licensure, interest in specialty certification to recognize the expert knowledge and skills of the RN is now growing at unprecedented rate. Hospitals and health care agencies are interested in marketing their services directly to consumers. Many of these organizations have focused marketing campaigns to highlight the certified professionals on their staff. Certified nurses are often proud of these marketing initiatives, as they want consumers to know that certification requires that specialized clinical practice and educational requirements be met. While there are more than 134 different nursing specialties, those organizations offering certification programs that have earned national accreditation represent the highest standards in nursing. An accredited nursing certification exam must have met quality standards and been reviewed by expert test and measurement professionals. The National Commission on Certifying Agencies (NCCA) is recognized as the leading accreditation organization for certification programs in the United States. The American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) also offers an accreditation process. Accredited certification exams reflect the highest standards in nursing certification.

Beginning in the late 1970s, specialization in nursing practice grew. With recognition of the importance of specialized knowledge and nursing skills, nursing leaders worked to construct unique objectives and standards for specialty nursing certification. The original intent of certification was to recognize nurses' exceptional knowledge or performance in a specialty practice area. Today's certified nurse must meet rigorous practice and education requirements and successfully pass a national examination that reflects specialty role objectives and standards of practice. As the popularity of specialty certification grew, so did the

