

# Certified Pediatric Nurses' Perceptions Of Job Satisfaction

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In 2008, the Pediatric Nursing Certification Board (PNCB) conducted a national survey of hospital-based pediatric nurses who hold the Certified Pediatric Nurse (CPN®) credential to learn more about their perceptions of job satisfaction. The survey sought to measure the impact of certification on job-related factors as well as those factors that contribute to the motivation of pediatric nurses to seek certification. With responses from over 1300 certified nurses, this survey provides valuable insight into these issues from the perspectives of hospital-based certified pediatric nurses.

PNCB is committed to working in partnership with employers to support quality pediatric nursing care at the bedside and increase nurse retention rates. For over 35 years, PNCB has developed nursing certification programs designed to promote worldwide excellence in health care for children. PNCB conducts four certification exams for pediatric nurses that include:

- The Certified Pediatric Nurse (CPN®) Exam. This exam is for the nurse who has extensive experience in general pediatric nursing practice and who demonstrates knowledge and abilities related to pediatric nursing beyond basic RN licensure.
- The Certified Pediatric Nurse Practitioner – Primary Care (CPNP-PC®) Exam. This exam is for the advanced practice nurse with extensive knowledge related to the diagnosis and management of primary care pediatric health care issues.
- The Certified Pediatric Nurse Practitioner – Acute Care (CPNP-AC®) Exam. This exam was created in response to the emerging role of Acute Care PNPs. These

The Pediatric Nursing Certification Board surveyed a national sample of 1354 hospital-based certified pediatric nurses (CPNs®) to determine their perceptions of certification on job satisfaction and other factors. There is a substantial body of literature that demonstrates job satisfaction among nurses positively increases retention and reduces absenteeism and burnout. CPNs® seek certification for a personal sense of achievement, professional recognition, and validation of clinical competency. The certified nurse survey respondents had self-reported high levels of job satisfaction and indicated that relationships with colleagues and a supportive work environment were very important to their levels of job satisfaction. The results of this study highlight important factors for hospitals to consider as they plan strategies and cost-effective ways to positively affect patient care and retain qualified pediatric nurses at the bedside.

advanced practice pediatric nurse practitioners manage the acute and urgent care needs of children in hospitals, clinics, and home settings.

- The Certified Pediatric Emergency Nurse (CPEN™) Exam. In 2008, PNCB developed this exam with the Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing (BCEN®). This unique exam was developed in response to the report by the Institute of Medicine (2006) identifying an urgent need for specialized nursing expertise in the management of the emergency health care needs of pediatric patients.

## Background

For the last decade, the U.S. health system has experienced a shortage of registered nurses (RNs). This shortage is predicated on employment of an aging nurse workforce, increasing opportunities for women in other professions, health care as a challenging work environment, and low job satisfaction, among other concerns (Gerson & Oliver, 2008). Although the recent economic slowdown has resulted in the loss of jobs of many workers, it has had the positive impact of reducing the nursing shortage by persuading RNs to return to the workplace and delaying the retirement of many. However, data indicate that as the economy rebounds and the nursing workforce ages, Baby Boomers with increasing complex

health needs will cause the nursing shortage to become more acute. It is estimated that by 2025, a shortfall of over one-quarter of a million nurses will develop (Buerhaus, Auerbach, & Staigler, 2009). Therefore, hospitals need to continue to create workforce environments that support professional practice and retain qualified nurses at the bedside.

## Job Satisfaction

There is sufficient evidence in the literature that demonstrates job satisfaction is a positive indicator of increased retention. Conversely, dissatisfaction has been shown to lead to turnover, absenteeism, and burnout (Perrine, 2009). These factors have a direct impact on staffing and scheduling, continuity of care, patient satisfaction, and team collaboration (Buerhaus, DesRoches, Donelon, & Hess, 2009). Since nurses are the largest group of health care workers, considerable research has been conducted related to nurse job satisfaction. The research on nursing job satisfaction can be categorized according to extrinsic or environmental factors, and intrinsic or personal variables. Environmental factors may include leadership styles of managers, pay, promotion, social interaction with peers, job content, and occupational level. Personal variables may include age, educational level, gender, and length of employment. Stamps and Piedmonte (1986), in their seminal

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work on nurses' job satisfaction, identified six components that measured job satisfaction among nurses: autonomy (the ability to exercise independent judgment), pay, professional status, interaction (nurse-nurse and physician-nurse), task requirements, and organizational policies.

In a 2008 national survey of 468 registered nurses, RNs were asked about their satisfaction with their nursing careers and satisfaction with their current jobs. When asked how satisfied they were with being a nurse, 87% of hospital-employed RNs providing direct patient care reported they were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with their career as a nurse. When asked about the satisfaction with their current nursing job, 73% were "very" or "somewhat" satisfied with their jobs. These survey results were similar to the job satisfaction ratings of nurses in the 2006 national survey (Buerhaus, DesRoches et al., 2009). Another study found that 127 nurses who had left work and were unemployed cited recognition for one's work, improvement in work conditions, opportunities for professional growth, and consideration of family needs as factors that might entice them to return to work (Langan, Tadych, Kao, & Israel, 2009). Additionally, in a longitudinal study of RNs from around the U.S., it was found that lack of job satisfaction and nurse perceptions of poor organizational commitment were linked as significant predictors of desire to quit (Brewer, Kovner, Greene, & Cheng, 2009).

### Job Satisfaction among Certified Nurses

For nurses who hold specialty nursing certification, job satisfaction has been found to be one of the benefits of certification, along with personal achievement, validation of knowledge, professional practice challenge, greater earning potential, commitment to professionalism, and access to a broad range of job opportunities (Gaberson, Schroeter, Killen, & Valentine, 2003). Certified nurses have been shown to possess increased perceptions of empowerment, and empowered nurses who receive adequate recognition by their employers may choose to remain in those health care organizations (Piazza, Donahue, Dykes, Griffin, & Fitzpatrick, 2006).

As interest has increased among hospitals to obtain Magnet status through the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) Magnet

Recognition Program®, recruitment and retention of nurses has gained momentum. One of the many criteria for Magnet status is the number of nurses who are certified by a nationally recognized certifying body. The interest in becoming a Magnet-designated facility has increased the focus within the hospital setting to recruit and retain certified nurses (Niebuhr & Biel, 2007). Hospitals have chosen to promote certification among the nursing staff by providing financial support for certification, supporting certification preparation, and rewarding certification among staff nurses. There is evidence that providing support to increase the number of certified nurses can subsequently decrease turnover and vacancy rates among nurses (Craven, 2007). ANCC acknowledges the importance of nationally accredited certification programs, such as PNCB's CPN® Exam, as an important quality indicator for hospitals to consider as they seek Magnet hospital recognition.

### Methods

In the summer of 2008, PNCB nurse researchers and volunteer pediatric nursing experts developed a survey to determine nurses' perceptions of certification on job satisfaction and other factors. This 22-question survey was sent to the population of 6,912 pediatric nurses who held the CPN® credential and indicated current employment in a community hospital or regional medical center. The survey was created in an electronic format using Survey Monkey™. PNCB contacted the certified nurses by email inviting them to participate in the survey and provided them with a link to the electronic survey tool. The invitation to participate was sent out on August 6, 2008, and the survey was closed on August 28, 2008. Of the 6,912 surveys sent, 1,354 CPNs® responded, for a 19.6% return rate. Because this represents the largest sample of certified hospital-based pediatric nurses for a national survey of this type, assumptions can be made about the survey findings on the importance of certification related to both job related and patient care factors.

### Sample Characteristics

The pediatric nurses who responded to the survey ranged in age from 22 to 70 years, with an average age of 42 years. More than half (56.1%) had

**Table 1.**  
**Levels of Job Satisfaction**  
**(N = 1354)**

Current Level of Job Satisfaction	Percent (%)
Excellent	30.3
Good	57.7
Fair	10.6
Poor	1.4

earned bachelor's degrees, 23.9% had associate degrees, 9.7% had diplomas, 9.7% held master's degrees, 0.4% had post-master's degrees, and 0.2% held doctoral degrees. On average, the survey respondents had been registered nurses for 17 years (range 1 year to 50 years), they had been pediatric nurses for 15.6 years (range 1 year to 46 years), and had been certified an average of 6 years (range less than 1 year to 30 years). The majority indicated they worked in a general pediatric practice setting (53.5%), 18.9% worked in critical care or ER, 3.2% worked in hematology/oncology, 1.4% worked in neurology, 1.2% worked in neonatology, and the remaining 21.7% worked in some other type of pediatric practice setting within the hospital that was not specified by the respondents. Overall, the demographic characteristics of these respondents mirrored those of the 2800 nurses who participated in PNCB's 2008 analysis of pediatric nursing tasks and competencies, which was a representative sample of pediatric nurses.

### Findings

The survey of certified pediatric nurses examined levels of job satisfaction and factors contributing to job satisfaction. Within a 4-point Likert scale, 88% of respondents noted that their job satisfaction was excellent to good (30.3% noted excellent job satisfaction with 57.7% reporting good job satisfaction). Only 1.4% indicated poor job satisfaction. Table 1 notes these levels of job satisfaction.

When asked to identify the importance of a variety of factors that contributed to their personal job satisfaction level, 82.0% of respondents indicated that relationships with colleagues was very important; 79.7% felt that a supportive work environment was very important to their levels of job satisfaction. Opportunities for advancement and employer men-

**Table 2.**  
**Factors Related to Job Satisfaction (N = 1354)**

Important Factors Impacting Job Satisfaction	Percent (%)
Relationship with colleagues	82.0
Supportive work environment	79.7
Relationship with supervisors	68.9
Benefits	66.2
Workload	65.8
Pay	63.2
Interactions with physicians	59.3
Employer recognition for CPN®	57.5
Performance recognition	53.1
Employer financial support for CPN® recertification fees	48.5
Employer financial support for continuing education	47.6
Opportunities for advancement	35.5
Employer mentoring programs	31.2

**Table 3.**  
**Factors Associated with Motivation to Seek Certification (N = 1354)**

Reasons to Seek Certification as CPN®	Percent (%)
Personal sense of achievement	93.5
Professional recognition	63.4
Validation of clinical competency	57.1
Supervisor encouragement	31.1
Friend/colleague encouragement	30.0
Increase in pay	26.4
Required for advancement	16.9
Magnet program requirement	13.6
Mentor encouragement	5.8
My basic nursing program encouraged it	3.6
None of the above	0.3

**Table 4.**  
**Factors Associated with Improving Clinical Care (N = 1354)**

CPN® Impact on Strengthening/Improving Job-Related Factors	Percent (%)
Confidence in clinical skills	71.3
Commitment to learning	71.6
Professional credibility	67.3
Interest and willingness to mentor colleagues	59.5
Others' confidence in my clinical skills	57.9
Professional autonomy	54.9
Job satisfaction	52.2
Collaboration with members of the health care team	46.3
Salary and benefits	32.4
Career/job promotion	30.5

toring programs rated the least important factors influencing job satisfaction at 35.5% and 31.2%, respectively. Other factors of interest in support of nurse job satisfaction included recognition of certification status and financial support for certification. Of the respondents, 57.5% rated employer recognition for CPN® as very important to their job satisfaction, and 48.5% indicated that employer financial support for CPN® recertification fees was very important to their current level of job satisfaction. All factors related to job satisfaction are profiled in Table 2.

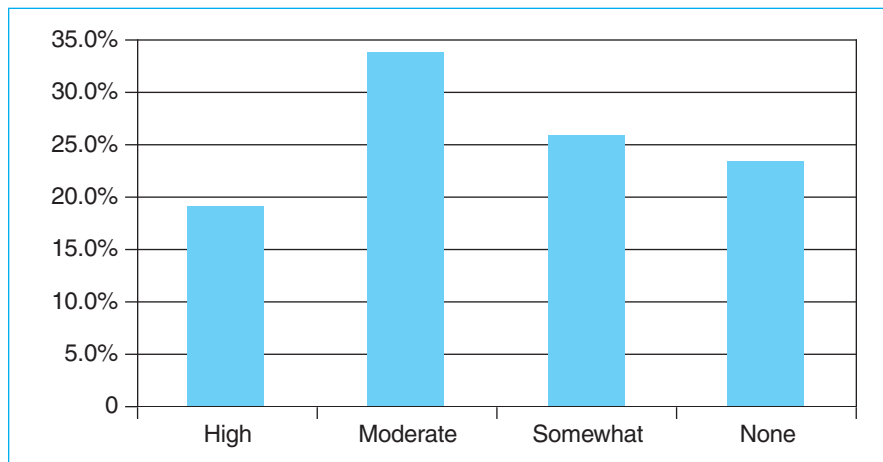
### Why Certify?

Personal sense of achievement (93.5%) leads the list of reasons CPNs® seek certification, followed by professional recognition (63.4%) and validation of clinical competency (57.1%). Of particular interest are the results related to economic benefits associated with achieving national certification. Although many nursing and hospital leaders may believe that added salary benefits are the primary reason a nurse might seek certification, only 26.4% of 1354 respondents indicated that an increase in pay was the primary reason they pursued CPN® certification. The many factors associated with motivation to seek certification are listed in Table 3.

Respondents also reported that certification strongly influenced their confidence in their clinical skills, commitment to learning, and professional credibility. Factors associated with improving clinical care are noted in Table 4.

Although employer recognition for CPN® certification was an important factor contributing to job satisfaction, respondents also noted that employer financial support for continuing education (CE) and employer financial support for CPN® recertification fees were important factors linked to satisfaction. It was especially interesting to note that the majority of respondents indicated their employers offered support for CE prior to taking the exam (76.0%). Reimbursement for the certification exam fees after passing the exam (73.6%) and financial assistance for exam preparation (57.7%) were also popular features offered by employers to support certification. Once pediatric nurses obtained CPN® certification, 61.0% of employers offered recognition of the accomplishment through a variety of measures, including a plaque ceremony, listing the credential on the name tag,

**Figure 1.**  
**The Perceived Impact of Certified Pediatric Nurses' Care on Patient/Family Satisfaction**



and/or a congratulatory notice in the hospital newsletter. Employers also provided reimbursement for recertification (47.2%) and recognized certification through clinical ladder advancement (45.4%).

### Effect of CPN® Certification On Patient and Family Satisfaction with Care

Although this survey of CPN® respondents helped strengthen the understanding of the impact of certification on the nurse, respondents in this survey were also asked to rate their perceptions of the influence of CPN® certification on patients' and families' perception of care. Of the survey respondents, 77.2% perceived that at some level, their nursing care had an impact on patient and family satisfaction as a result of earning the CPN® certification (see Figure 1). A typical respondent CPN® comment noted, "When families learn about my specialty certification, they have confidence in my abilities to provide the best care to their children." Since certification is an important factor that has been linked to the recognition of quality nursing care and nurse job satisfaction, the potential for nurses with CPN® certification to have a positive impact on patient and family satisfaction might be considered by hospitals seeking to improve patient satisfaction.

### Implications for Nursing And Future Research

The results of a national survey of CPNs® continue to validate the bene-

fits of nursing certification to the nurse, hospital, and patient/family. CPNs® have a commitment to learning, a willingness to mentor others, confidence in their clinical skills, a sense of professional credibility, and professional autonomy. These factors positively influence job satisfaction among CPNs® and affirm previous research that has linked professional recognition, rather than personal economic benefit, as more important to professional certified nurses in terms of job satisfaction and retention. Hospitals can encourage certification by offering incentives and professional encouragement for certification and reducing financial barriers to certification. Although empirical evidence is needed to validate the impact of certification on patient satisfaction, employing and supporting certified nurses should be considered as a cost-effective approach to retaining a nurse workforce that has the potential to influence patient and family satisfaction.

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