

Nursing Specialty Certification in Maryland

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Introduction: In its 2011 report, *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*, the Institute of Medicine recommended nurses develop a commitment to life-long learning, whether through advance nursing degrees or specialty certification. Nursing specialty certification is viewed as a demonstration of nursing skills, knowledge and expertise within an area of practice and is considered an important aspect for institutions seeking Magnet® Recognition. To best support Maryland nurses in achieving this recommendation, an assessment was needed on the current state of our work force's certification status.

Methods: A subcommittee of the Academic Progression Committee of the Maryland Action Coalition was convened to promote nursing specialty certification statewide. A 12-question survey was developed and administered electronically via SurveyMonkey to two email distribution groups: the Deans and Directors of Maryland Schools of Nursing and the Maryland Organization of Nurse Executives. The intended audience was nurse leaders in acute care hospitals and academic institutions that could answer questions regarding certification of the nursing staff at their organizations. The survey sought information regarding the percentage of specialty certified nurses employed in the organization, support provided for preparation of certification examinations, certification recognition within the organization, and level of involvement with the Magnet® Recognition program.

Results: The survey was initially open for 3 weeks, after which a reminder email was sent and the survey was available an additional 2 weeks. Forty (40) surveys were completed: acute care 24 (60%), academia 14 (35%), and other 2 (5%). Responders from acute care were primarily 250-500 bed hospitals (n=16; 67%) and from academia were university schools of nursing and community colleges (n=10; 71%). The percentage of specialty certified nurses employed in acute care were highest in the 21-30% range (n=7; 29%) and in the 51-60% (n=3; 12.5%). In academia, the highest result was in the 51-60% range (n=3; 29%). Support provided for preparation of certification examinations in both settings surveyed was through financial assistance for examination fees (n=16; 55.5%), exam preparation courses (n=14; 48.3%) and certification renewal fees (n=10; 34.5%). Recognition methods for specialty certified staff was provided via organizational newsletter announcements (n=12; 41.4%), certification designation on employee identification badges (n=10; 34.5%), congratulatory letters from leadership (n=9; 31%) and certification ceremonies (n=9; 27.6%). Acute care institutions were asked if they were involved with the Magnet® Recognition program. Magnet® designation had been earned by 7 (53%), 5 were on the journey to Magnet® designation (38.5%) and 1 had a Pathway designation (8%).

Future Plans: Additional methods to encourage nurses in Maryland to achieve specialty certification need to be identified and implemented. Barriers to certification also need further exploration.

Conclusion: Nursing specialty certification provides the opportunity for nursing professionals to be life-long learners and recognized as experts in clinical practice. This survey served to collect initial data regarding specialty certification in Maryland and guide future assessment and interventions.