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The Impact of Certification on Certified Perioperative Nurses: A Qualitative Descriptive Survey

Kathryn Schroeter

Marquette University, kathryn.schroeter@marquette.edu

Michelle Byrne

North Georgia College and State University

Katharine Klink

Carroll University

Matthew Beier

Aurora Medical Center

Natalie S. McAndrew

University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee

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LES RÉPERCUSSIONS DE LA RECONNAISSANCE PROFESSIONNELLE SUR LES INFIRMIÈRES ET LES INFIRMIERS AUTORISÉS EN SOINS PÉRIOPÉRATOIRES : UNE ENQUÊTE DESCRIPTIVE QUALITATIVE

Auteurs :

Kathryn Schroeter, Ph. D., IA, IASO, est professeure adjointe au collège de soins infirmiers de l'Université Marquette, à Milwaukee, WI ainsi que chercheuse principale pour cette étude de recherche.

Michelle M. Byrne, Ph. D., IA, IASO, est professeure et coordonnatrice du programme d'éducation de la M. Sc. Inf., au North Georgia College et à l'Université d'état – département des soins infirmiers et co-chercheuse principale pour cette étude de recherche.

Katharine A. Klink, M. S. Inf., IA, est professeure adjointe clinique à l'Université Carroll et elle a été responsable de l'analyse des données et de l'analyse documentaire pour cette étude.

Matthew Beier, M. Sc. Inf., IA, ICS - détenteur d'un certificat de spécialiste, IASO, est directeur des services chirurgicaux au Aurora Medical Center, à Grafton, WI, et est responsable de l'analyse des données pour cette étude.

Natalie S. McAndrew, M. S. Inf., IA, IA en soins de phase aiguë, ICS, est ICS à l'unité de soins intensifs cardiovasculaires de l'Hôpital Froedtert du Medical College of Wisconsin, à Milwaukee, WI, et est responsable de l'analyse des données pour cette étude.

Les perceptions des infirmières et des infirmiers, telles qu'observées dans cette étude, ont révélé des aspects positifs liés à l'obtention de leur agrément en soins périopératoires.

RÉSUMÉ :

A lors que la pratique des soins de santé fait de plus en plus de progrès au plan de la technologie et que cette dernière est de plus en plus spécialisée et complexe, on observe une demande accrue pour l'obligation de rendre compte. La reconnaissance professionnelle indique qu'un praticien ou une praticienne a maintenu un niveau de compétences, de connaissances et de techniques acceptable, ou possède peut-être même un niveau supérieur dans un domaine de pratique spécialisée.

Bien que la reconnaissance professionnelle des infirmières et des infirmiers soit offerte depuis des décennies, une évaluation plus poussée de sa signification et de ses répercussions dans le contexte de la pratique ne semblait pas exister. L'objectif de cette étude qualitative, menée à Chicago, en Illinois et aussi en ligne, était de décrire les perceptions des infirmières et des infirmiers en soins périopératoires quant aux répercussions qu'a eu la reconnaissance professionnelle sur leur pratique professionnelle et dans leur vie personnelle. Le concept d'enquête qualitative a été utilisé pour cette étude. Un échantillon au jugé (N = 149) a été obtenu des infirmières et des infirmiers autorisés en soins périopératoires, détenteurs d'un certificat de spécialiste.

Une analyse thématique a été utilisée pour expliquer les perceptions des infirmières et des infirmiers. Cette analyse thématique consistait à chercher à travers les données, dans le cas présent, les réponses fournies lors de l'enquête, afin d'identifier tout schéma récurrent. Un thème se compose d'un groupe de catégories connexes communiquant des significations semblables et ressort habituellement par le biais d'un processus analytique inductif. Les thèmes qui sont ressortis des données ont été divisés en deux groupes – les répercussions sur la pratique professionnelle et celles sur la vie personnelle. Le thème principal qui est ressorti par rapport au point de vue personnel des répondants était la fierté de leurs accomplissements ou de leurs réalisations et une confiance accrue. Le thème qui décrivait les répercussions professionnelles était la crédibilité. Certains thèmes, comme les connaissances, la confiance et les possibilités, se chevauchaient dans les deux groupes.

Les perceptions des infirmières et des infirmiers, telles qu'observées dans cette étude, ont révélé des aspects positifs liés à l'obtention de leur agrément en soins périopératoires. Les conclusions de cette recherche contribuent à accroître nos connaissances quant à la façon dont la reconnaissance professionnelle a des répercussions sur les expériences personnelles et professionnelles des infirmières et des infirmiers.

KEYWORDS: CERTIFICATION, PERIOPERATIVE NURSING, PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE, CONFIDENCE, CREDIBILITY.

THE IMPACT OF CERTIFICATION ON CERTIFIED PERIOPERATIVE NURSES: A QUALITATIVE DESCRIPTIVE SURVEY

Authors:

Kathryn Schroeter, PhD, RN, CNOR, is Assistant Professor College of Nursing, Marquette University, Milwaukee, WI, and Primary Investigator for this research study.

Michelle M. Byrne, PhD, RN, CNOR, is Professor and MS Nursing Education Program Coordinator, North Georgia College & State University - Dept. of Nursing, and Co-Primary Investigator for this research study.

Katharine A. Klink, MSN, RN, is Clinical Assistant Professor at Carroll University and was responsible for Data Analysis and Literature review for this study.

Matthew Beier, MS, RN, CNS-BC, CNOR, is Manager of Surgical Services, Aurora Medical Center - Grafton, WI, and responsible for Data Analysis for this study.

Natalie S. McAndrew, MSN, RN, CCRN, CNS, is CNS – Cardiovascular ICU, Froedtert Hospital/Medical College of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI, and responsible for Data Analysis for this study.

ABSTRACT

As the practice of healthcare becomes more technologically advanced, specialized and complex, there is an increasing demand for accountability. Certification demonstrates that an individual practitioner has maintained an acceptable, or perhaps more advanced level of qualifications, knowledge, and skills in a specialty practice area.

The nurses' perceptions, as shared in this study, revealed positive aspects related to their achievement of certification in perioperative practice.

Although certification for nurses has been available for decades a detailed evaluation of its meaning and implications for practice seems to be unavailable. The purpose of this qualitative study, conducted in Chicago, Illinois and also online, was to describe the perceptions of perioperative nurses as related to the impact that certification has had on both their professional practice and on a personal level. A qualitative survey design was used for this study. A purposive sample (N = 149) was obtained from board certified perioperative specialty nurses.

Thematic analysis was used to explain the nurses' perceptions. Thematic analysis involves searching through data, in this case the narrative responses to the survey, to identify any recurrent patterns. A theme is a cluster of linked categories conveying similar meanings and usually emerges through the inductive analytic process. Themes that emerged from the data were categorized

into two groups -- impact on professional practice and personal impact. The primary theme that emerged related to respondents' personal perspectives was pride in accomplishment or achievement and increased confidence. The theme that described professional impact was credibility. Some themes, such as knowledge, confidence, and opportunity, overlapped both groups.

The nurses' perceptions, as shared in this study, revealed positive aspects related to their achievement of certification in perioperative practice. The findings of this research expand knowledge about how certification impacts on the nurses' personal and professional experiences.

INTRODUCTION

There is an increasing demand for accountability in all areas of society and this is especially evident in health care

THE IMPACT OF CERTIFICATION (cont.)

where practice has become more technologically advanced, specialized and complex. Certification has evolved to demonstrate to the public, and the profession, that an individual practitioner has maintained an acceptable or perhaps more advanced level of continuing qualifications, knowledge, and skills in his or her specialty practice area. Expert knowledge, clinical judgment, communication skills, professionalism, and performance are but a few of the aspects associated with obtaining and maintaining certification.

If nurses meet the established criteria for certification they may sit the examination. As a result, nurses from countries other than the United States may hold the CNOR (perioperative certification) credential. The Competency and Credentialing Institute (CCI) developed the CNOR credential and has maintained it for more than 30 years. According to CCI membership data (2011), there are approximately 160 international nurses who hold the CNOR credential and 32% of those nurses are Canadian.¹

In Canada the Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) offers the CNA certification in 19 specialties/areas of nursing practice. The number of nurses with valid CNA certification has risen from 14,526 in 2007 to 16,878 in 2011.² According to the CNA Professional Practice & Regulation division as of July, 2011, there are 1,538 nurses who hold the perioperative specialty certification of CPN(C).² The CNA certification is a voluntary, recognized credential for registered nurses who meet specific nursing practice criteria, continuous learning and exam-based testing requirements. The credential, which must be renewed every five years, confirms that an RN has demonstrated competence in a nursing specialty/area of nursing practice by having met predetermined standards.²

Certification represents a commitment to the leading edge in health-care and professional standards and indicates to patients, employers, the public and professional licensing bodies that the certified nurse is qualified, competent

and current in a nursing specialty/area of practice.² Various studies have postulated that certification provides an opportunity to establish expertise within a nursing specialty.³⁻¹⁰ The National League for Nursing (NLN) postulates that certification creates a means for nurses to demonstrate their expertise in a specialty role.¹⁰ Nursing specialty certification is evidence of a commitment to professional nursing practice and quality patient outcomes.^{3,5,12-15}

Although certification for perioperative nurses, in both the United States and Canada, has been available for decades, a detailed understanding of its meaning and implications for practice did not seem to be available. The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the perceptions of perioperative nurses related to the impact that certification has both on their professional practice and on a personal level. The survey focused on the areas of patient outcomes, the value of certification, and the influence of specialty certification on professional practice in order to more fully describe, explain, and examine the phenomenon of certification and its impact on nurses.

Patient Outcomes

An important area of certification research development is the influence of nursing specialty certification on professional practice. To explore this question Cary¹³ randomly sampled 19,452 nurses from 20 different nursing specialties in the United States, the District of Columbia, Canada, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. A large portion of the sample (72 percent) received at least one or more benefits from their certification status such as recognition, promotion, increased pay, or job security. An important finding from this large study was that 40 percent of nurses who had been certified for 5 years or less believed that certification improved their confidence in detecting and intervening in complications when delivering nursing care. Cary asserts that this finding provides limited evidence that certification may be an important system-related variable that should be considered in the evaluation of patient outcomes.¹³

Certification, and how it relates to patient outcomes, is challenging to study because of the complexity of the variables and factors that influence patient care. The relationship between such factors as increased knowledge, confidence and skill has potential to greatly influence patient outcomes.⁷ The evidence on nurse certification and its influence on patient outcomes have, to date, been mixed.^{15,16} A study by Frank-Stromborg, et.al. examined the effect of oncology nurse certification (OCN) on the nurse sensitive patient outcomes of symptom management (fatigue and pain), adverse events (infection and decubitus ulcers), and admissions to the hospital. It was hypothesized that OCNs would have significantly better outcomes. The data did not, however, support this hypothesis. A limitation of the study, as acknowledged by the study authors, was the fact that data was obtained from retrospective chart reviews and there were no controls so the acuity and patient risk of complications may have differed in the certified and noncertified nurse groups.

Newhouse, Johantgen, Pronovost, and Johnson¹⁷ studied the effects of specialty certification, RN agency use, 24-hour staffing, and code drills on patient outcomes (mortality, complications and length of stay). A total of 32 hospitals in Maryland participated in the study. Surveys that addressed the Perioperative Nursing Data Set (PNDS) elements, that links nursing interventions to specified patient outcomes, were sent to perioperative managers. The estimated odds of complications, while not statistically significant, decreased by eight percent for every ten percent increase in the proportion of nurses who were certified in perioperative nursing (CNOR).

Kendall-Gallagher and Blegen¹⁸ used secondary data analysis to examine the possible relationship between the number of certified critical care nurses and adverse patient events in a sample of 48 intensive care units from a random sample of 29 hospitals from across the United States. Data were collected regarding the number of certified nurses, organizational and nurse characteristics,

IMPACT OF CERTIFICATION (cont.)

and adverse patient events (medication errors, falls, skin breakdown and hospital acquired infections). The researchers found that the proportion of intensive care nurses who hold the CCRN credential had an inverse relationship to the number of documented falls. It is evident from the research reviewed that certification may be influential on patient outcomes. However, the effect of specialty certification on patient outcomes requires further study.^{13,17,18}

The Value of Certification

Many studies have examined the value that nurses and nurse managers place on certification.^{6,18,19,20} The Perceived Value of Certification Tool® (PVCT®) was developed, by the US-based Competency and Credentialing Institute, to measure the value of certification in perioperative nursing and can be accessed at <http://www.cc-institute.org/aprn/resources/pvct>.⁶ The results of a study that was based on a pilot test of the tool indicated that, with the exception of the item indicating that certification increases salary, the sample (90 percent) agreed with the value of certification as it related to feelings of accomplishment, satisfaction, validation of specialty knowledge, professional growth, and commitment, professional challenge and credibility.⁶

The PVCT®, although originally developed for perioperative nurses, has since been used in other certification studies as the constructs of certification value are also applicable to other nursing specialties.^{18,19} These studies demonstrated that certification is valued by certified and noncertified nurses.¹⁹ Certified nurses had higher agreement scores on the value statements than non-certified nurses.^{20,21}

Achievement of Magnet® designation, developed by the American Nurses Credentialing Centre, by a health care organization is considered demonstration of an environment where nursing excellence is prevalent. Certification is one of many elements examined when hospitals apply for Magnet® designation.²² The fact that the number of nurses certified in an organization must be reported in the Magnet® application process may be one explanation for why nurse managers indicated a higher value of certification on the PVCT® value statements.^{22,23} It is apparent from this review that both certified and noncertified nurses in various specialties value certification^{6,19,20} and that nurse managers also hold a nurse's certification status in high esteem.¹⁹⁻²¹

Professional Practice

The nurses in Cary's¹³ study reported that certification increased their sense of control over their practice and autonomy, and also enhanced communication and collaboration. Researchers studying professional practice and certification have examined variables such as empowerment and autonomy²⁴ to explore the possible influence of certification on these factors. Piazza, et, al.²⁴ also explored the differences in nurses' perceptions of empowerment and found significant differences in the empowerment scores – with the certified nurses having a greater sense of empowerment than the non-certified nurses.

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THE IMPACT OF CERTIFICATION (cont.)

Wynd²⁵ measured nurses' attitudes toward professionalism using a descriptive comparative/correlational design. Data analysis revealed that attitudes toward professionalism were significantly related to nurses' experience, higher education in nursing, membership in professional organizations and specialty certification.

Our review of professional practice and certification shows, overall, that nurses associate certification with empowerment,²⁴ professionalism²⁸ and collaboration and job satisfaction.¹⁵ While the majority of studies have focused on patient outcomes,¹⁶⁻¹⁸ the value of certification,^{6,19-21} and how certification relates to professional practice,^{24,28} few studies have allowed nurses to articulate, in their own words, the personal and professional meaning of certification.

Many of the studies that have explored the value of nursing certification have used a survey data tool,^{6,13,19-21} that limited the participants' ability to describe, in narrative detail, their perception of certification and its effect on them personally and professionally. In order to address this issue, the qualitative study, being discussed in this article, was designed to provide certified perioperative nurses with the opportunity to describe their feelings and beliefs about the professional and personal value of certification.

Theoretical framework

Certification, as a component of professionalism, contributes to the creation of a nurse's professional identity and, in turn, a deeper sense of self-identity. Self-identity can be defined as feelings of existence, integrity, identification. It is formed through the roles one portrays and through interactions with others.²⁶ According to Ohlen and Segesten,²⁷ professional identity is integrated with personal self-identity and includes how nurses see themselves within the profession of nursing. Competencies within the profession, such as those demonstrated for certification, allow the nurse to develop a greater sense of self-identity and, in turn, a more multifaceted professional identity.

Certification impacts self-identity and its influence on professional identity through group membership as based on Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT).²⁸ The Social Identity Theory refers to the self-identity of a person and how this is influenced by membership and emotional significance of belonging to a group.²⁹ One distinctive variable in Tajfel and Turner's theory is how a person achieves positive self-esteem and self-identity, while being categorized as part of a group, based on specialized skills or attributes.²⁸ The application of the SIT to nursing certification creates a link between the importance of certification, the development of self-identity, and the impact this has on professional identity.

Group membership enhances the creation of positive self-identity through interactions with others and as a result of the positive attributes associated with the group itself. The relationship between development of self-identity, group membership, and professional identity within the Social Identity Theory helps to explain the benefits of professional certification.

Protection of Research Participants

This study was identified as exempt by a university institutional review board prior to initiation of the survey. Participants were informed that they could cease participation in this study at any time without penalty. As the survey was completely voluntary, there were no hazardous, uncomfortable, or stressful aspects involved in completing the survey. The individual responses were anonymous and reported as aggregate.

Method

A descriptive qualitative method was used for this study topic. The two primary researchers for this study were doctorally prepared qualitative researchers. Graduate students worked with one of the researchers on the data analysis and also wrote sections of the research reports.

Research participants were all certified perioperative nurses. Data were collected during a limited span of time (4 days) during the 2010 Association of Perioperative Registered Nurses

(AORN) Congress. Participants were notified of the upcoming survey through pre-conference electronic newsletters sponsored by the Competency and Credentialing Institute (CCI). In addition, the certified perioperative nurses were invited verbally during an opening address, to a large audience, at the beginning of the conference. Both handwritten and electronic surveys were available to participants in a concierge room specifically sponsored for the board certified perioperative nurse delegates. The room contained signs, tables, chairs, and computers as well as boxes for the collection of paper surveys. All participants were asked to provide contact information as one participant was later randomly selected to win a free CNOR re-certification (Value \$210-\$280). Computer terminals were accessible for participants who chose to respond to the survey electronically.

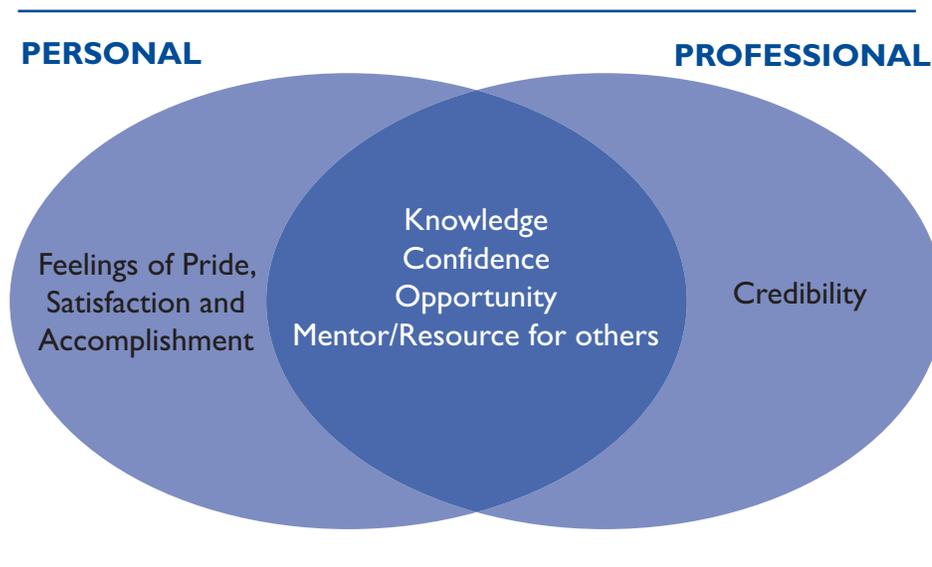
The survey consisted of two open-ended questions, developed based on the previous literature, addressing the participants' perceptions of certification. The open-ended questions were piloted for clarity with eight board certified perioperative nurses. The survey took approximately five to fifteen minutes to complete (depending upon the length of the narrative responses).

Credibility of data

Although participant contact data was collected in order to incent participation, it was also envisioned that there may be a need to complete member checks in order to confirm qualitative descriptive themes. This step was, however, deemed unnecessary by the researchers as there had already been multiple researchers involved in the thematic analysis. These multiple researchers (three certified perioperative nurses, one non-certified perioperative nurse, one board certified critical care nurse and one nurse researcher) provided a variety of lenses which serve as an indicator of the credibility of the findings. Another credibility indicator for this research was immersion in the data³⁰ as the thematic analysis of the data occurred over a six-month period with reflexive interpretations between researchers.

THE IMPACT OF CERTIFICATION (cont.)

Figure 1. Certified Nurses' Perceptions of the Impact that Certification has on them Personally & Professionally



During the data analysis phase field notes were utilized for comparison and to establish trustworthiness and inter-rater reliability between the reviewers.

Sample

A purposive sample (N=149) was obtained from board certified perioperative specialty nurses who were attending the AORN National Congress. Some participants (n=16) completed the survey electronically while the majority (n=133) completed the paper and pencil version of the survey. All certified nurse participants were over the age of 18 and represented a variety of ages and ethnicities. The mean age of the participants was 52 years. Female nurses comprised 97 percent of the sample and male nurses comprised 3 percent.

Research Questions

The two research questions were:

1. Describe the impact (if any) that certification has had on your professional practice? Please provide an example; and
2. Describe the impact (if any) that certification has had on you personally? Please provide an example.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed in this study. Three types of data coding were

used in the analysis: open coding for comparative analysis; axial coding to establish categories and subcategories; and selective coding to combine and integrate all categories into central/core categories.³⁰ Use of notes and diagrams helped to clarify and confirm the process of data analysis. According to Lincoln & Guba the results and conclusions of the study should reflect the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than those of the researcher, and this is established via notes and/or an audit trail.³⁰

The participants' responses were italicized and actual quotations were used to support the derived themes. The multiple researchers, both certified and non-certified in perioperative nursing, examined common patterns and themes of the content using qualitative strategies.^{30,31} The researchers generated themes, using these patterns, that provided a description of how certification impacted the participants personally and/or professionally.

Results

The major themes that emerged from this analysis included knowledge enhancement, confidence, opportunity, and the role of mentor. Actual quotations will be provided as thick

descriptions supporting the themes and allowing for readers to transfer the findings to their areas of interest. These themes were found in both the personal and professional perspectives of the respondents. The theme of pride/satisfaction/accomplishment emerged only in the personal perspectives and the theme of credibility was evident only in the respondents' professional perspectives. (see Figure 1)

Brief examples of the comments to researchers have, in order to illustrate the participants' descriptions, been described and categorized as follows:

- Selected narrative examples of the certified nurses' perceptions that reflected mutually exclusive themes (see Table 1); and
- Selected examples of the certified nurses' perceptions of the impact that certification has on them personally & professionally. (see Table 2)

Themes from the Personal Perspective

The primary theme elicited from participants, when describing the personal impact of certification, reflects feelings of pride, a sense of accomplishment or achievement, and increased confidence. One participant shared "I'm proud to be certified. I wear my pin so patients know..." Another participant stated "The most impact of achieving certification was personal satisfaction and pride in my achievement."

Themes from the Professional Perspective

The main theme elicited by participants, when describing the professional impact of certification, was credibility. Nurses reported that being recognized by colleagues such as managers, peers, patients, students, and surgeons reinforced this feeling of credibility. In addition, the nurses conveyed that they felt more respected and even felt honored by their colleagues as a result of their certification. One nurse stated "I believe that certification increases one's credibility as a professional and as an expert. This credibility enhances one's

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position at the table when advocating for patients.”

Mutually Inclusive Themes

Themes that were identified in both personal and professional domains included knowledge, confidence, opportunity, and being a mentor for others. Knowledge referred to the information gained through studying for the certification exam as well as the

increase in knowledge relating to perioperative practice. This was conveyed by a nurse who felt certification was the driving force behind continuing education in perioperative nursing practice. Other nurses expressed that because of their certification they attended many more educational offerings and had a more acute awareness of the importance of life-long learning. This learning not only

increased their overall specialty knowledge but kept them abreast of practice changes.

One nurse commented that [certification] ‘has made me more conscientious and aware of safe patient care practices.’ Another nurse summed up her feelings by saying “As for my professional practice, being certified demonstrates my broad knowledge in

Table 1. Selected narrative examples of the certified nurses’ perceptions that reflected mutually exclusive themes

Knowledge	Confidence	Opportunity	Mentor/Resource
<p>“Maintaining my CNOR certification has helped me keep up with the most current knowledge and research out there in my specialty.”</p>	<p>“... it gives me more confidence and belief in my practice. I trust myself and have confidence in my education.”</p>	<p>“... it has enabled me to get employment at different medical centers and consulting jobs.”</p>	<p>“It makes me more respected because I am certified. It also makes me a resource for the new nurses...”</p>
<p>“Although I have always “thirsted” for new information, achieving CNOR meant that I would always be ... expanding my knowledge to keep my certification and to provide each patient in my care with a competent perioperative nurse”</p>	<p>“I am focused on learning more. Every time you read and attend conferences you learn more which empowers you. This has given me more confidence in myself as an OR Nurse.”</p>	<p>“I have been teaching for many years now, and the required credits to maintain my certification has given me the opportunity to continue my learning process in the perioperative arena.”</p>	<p>“... I took the test to prove to myself that I was competent. As I shared all the information I learning in preparing for the test, coworkers got interested. I have coached 6... and have seen professional confidence grow in my department.”</p>
<p>“My confidence in my knowledge was reinforced and makes me a more proactive nurse sharing my knowledge with others.”</p>	<p>“It helped me become more confident in being a leader and staff developer (educator).”</p>	<p>“Certification has served as a source of... financial incentive in the form of a certification bonus by (my) employer.”</p>	<p>“By having my certification, many look to me as the expert of governing knowledge. Often my opinion is asked in reference to ... perioperative nursing.”</p>
<p>“... I have always thirsted for new information, achieving CNOR meant that I would be always reading or expanding my knowledge horizons to keep my certification.”</p>	<p>“The CNOR fosters confidence and credibility in my own perception of my abilities”</p> <p>“Certification has given me a sense of self-confidence.”</p>	<p>“...has enabled me to advance my career within my organization. In the past 6 months, I have received a raise, promotion, and employer recognition.”</p>	<p>“My coworkers will approach me with practice questions and use me for a resource ... I feel like I can contribute to safe and excellent care for my patients because I have a firm reference base”</p>
<p>“The most important thing professionally that maintaining my certification has done was to keep me current in my practice.”</p>	<p>“...gives me the confidence to take a stand on practice issues.”</p>	<p>“Once I was certified I applied for the clinical ladder nurse III in my hospital, which I was awarded.”</p>	<p>“The impact on my professional practice of certification is one of increased motivation to encourage my co-workers to become certified.”</p>
<p>“My professional practice is influenced by the knowledge that I have acquired from my educational endeavor.”</p>		<p>“There is a 5% increase in pay for being certified.”</p>	<p>“It [certification] gives me an edge with my fellow co-workers. I have been one of the ‘go to’ people.”</p>

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surgical care and my dedication to my patients. Having my certification also raises the bar for my colleagues in surgical services.”

Mentor/Resource for Others

An additional prominent theme was that certified nurses described a sense of obligation as a resource person and mentor, both formally and informally, for other perioperative nurses. The participants described the need to advocate for other nurses to take the exam and to promote specialty certification in their site of employment. One participant stated “Certification affords me the ability to encourage other staff members to attain certification. The certification rate in our facility is 69%!” Another participant wrote, “I personally mentor other members of my OR to work on completing their certifications.”

In a further example, one participant stated “It has helped me become a resource person for the staff who are not as knowledgeable on all areas in the

OR. This indirectly caused me to become an informal leader among my peers.” Participants also identified how certification has led to them becoming a resource and a leader beyond the operating room. Another respondent spoke to physician recognition by stating “I feel that my voice is more respected by my colleagues and the surgeons. I have observed that my opinion regarding particular issues has been sought out.”

Opportunity

Another recurring theme described how certification has given perioperative nurses the opportunity for advancement in their careers. One contributor recalled “It has enabled me to advance my career within my organization. In the past six months I have received a raise, promotion and employer recognition.”

Some employers recognize certified nurses with monetary incentives. One certified nurse stated “There is a 5%

increase in pay for being certified.” Likewise another echoed “Certification has served as a source of...financial incentive in the form of a certification bonus by (my) present employer.”

Survey participants were clear that being certified in the perioperative setting has provided many benefits to them. One nurse stated “I believe that it helps (me) to get hired wherever I want to work.” And another stated “I believe that certification was directly linked to my employability.”

Confidence

Another emerging theme was an increased level of confidence in practice as a result of certification. One nurse commented “The CNOR fosters confidence and credibility in my own perception of my abilities,” and another nurse echoed “Certification has increased my confidence in myself and my practice.” One more nurse stated that certification has “given me more confidence in myself as an OR nurse.”

Table 2. Selected examples of the certified nurses’ perceptions of the impact that certification has on them personally & professionally

Personal Theme: Feelings of Pride, Satisfaction, Accomplishment	Professional Theme: Credibility
<p><i>“I’m proud to be certified. I wear my pin so patients know ...”</i></p> <p><i>“The most impact of achieving certification was personal satisfaction and pride in my achievement.”</i></p> <p><i>I’m proud that I have this certification. My co-workers and personal friends look at me differently, I believe. Maybe I just look at myself differently. Even though there are a lot of nurses certified, it feels like I’m the one.”</i></p> <p><i>“Personally, I know that my patients’ are always first in my mind. When they ask what do the initials CNOR mean, I am proud to elaborate and explain, usually ending with a broad smile from the patient.”</i></p> <p><i>“Certification has given me a sense of personal accomplishment ... It gives me a deep sense of satisfaction knowing my specialized knowledge is recognized and respected among colleagues and physicians.”</i></p>	<p><i>“...I know my credential gives me credibility with my students”.</i></p> <p><i>“My patients question the meaning of CNOR. They seem to really appreciate being taken of by someone who has gone the extra mile to be good in their field.”</i></p> <p><i>“With my certification comes more autonomy and credibility. I go above and beyond the usual competency and educational requirements of my facility.”</i></p> <p><i>“I believe that certification increases one’s credibility as a professional and as an expert. This credibility enhances one’s position at the table when advocating for patients.”</i></p> <p><i>“It clearly demonstrates to my employer, peers, and patients that I am extremely competent and committed. It enhances my credibility with physicians and leadership...”</i></p>

And yet another stated, “Personally, it gives me more confidence and belief in my practice. I trust myself and have confidence in my education.”

Certification also promotes confidence as a nurse leader. One nurse, who is in a leadership position, commented how certification “gives me the confidence to take a stand on practice issues.” Another nurse stated “My confidence in my knowledge was reinforced (through certification) and makes me a more proactive nurse sharing my knowledge with others.”

Knowledge

Many of the nurses who responded stated that achieving CNOR has increased their knowledge in the operating room. One nurse stated “My professional practice is influenced by the knowledge that I have acquired from my proactive or educational endeavor (CNOR).” Still another nurse stated “Maintaining my CNOR has helped me keep up with the most current knowledge and research out there in my specialty.”

Staying current in operating room knowledge through certification has effects beyond the individual certified nurse. Nurses who participated commented on how they used their increased knowledge to affect patient care. One nurse noted how certification can “Expand and broaden knowledge with the bottom line on the best practices and outcomes for our patients.” The knowledge of a certified nurse also affects those around them. One nurse commented “Maintaining contact hours made it possible for me to bring back that knowledge to my coworkers,” while another nurse stated “My knowledge is shared with my colleagues who are not up to date.”

Limitations

This study was implemented at a national conference, possibly reflecting a bias of enhanced professionalism of our participants. As the place for data collection was a concierge room

specifically designated for board certified perioperative nurses, and funded by the certification body, there could be a positive influencing bias factor. Member checking adds credibility to the findings and the researchers deemed that the research team of six nurses provided a broad lens for analysis and confirmation of the thematic findings. Another limitation is that this research is perception based and lacks the direct linkage to how certification impacts patient outcomes.

Implications for further research, education and practice

There have been numerous studies, both quantitative and qualitative, that have examined the perceived value of certification.¹⁸⁻²¹ Future research focusing on how certification actually impacts nurse practice and patient outcomes would be scientifically warranted. Nurse educators and clinicians should promote life-long learning as a mandate to students and practicing nurses. This research would provide specific examples of how certification is valued both personally and professionally.

SUMMARY

Perioperative nursing has competencies that are similar and evident in Canada and the US. Certification in these two countries are comparable and the data from this study is relevant to both.

Themes from this data were categorized into two main domains: impact on professional practice and personal impact. Some themes overlapped into both groups. Nurses reported that certification impacted their professional practice via increased knowledge, career advancement, enhanced credibility and respect, improved salary, maintenance of current practice skills and becoming recognized as a resource for others. The impact of certification on the nurses personally included: increased confidence and pride and feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction. The themes support the Social Identity Theory through participants’

statements on group involvement, and how this enhances the distinction of the group from others, but also how it helps one define positive feelings of self. Positivity, as articulated by the study participants, was reflected in a variety of ways from increased knowledge to increased confidence.

The perceptions of the nurses revealed many positive aspects related to their achievement of specialty nursing certification in perioperative practice. The relationship between such factors as increased knowledge, confidence and skill has potential to greatly influence positive patient outcomes. The findings of this research expand knowledge about what certification means to the professional nurse in both personal and professional domains, thus providing insight into the perceived benefits of certification.

ORNAC Standards pertaining to this article can be found in the Operating Room Nurses Association of Canada (ORNAC) (May 2011) Standards, Guidelines, and Position Statements for Perioperative Registered Nursing Practice (10th edition). Section 1, p.21.

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