

ONCOLOGY NURSING SOCIETY POSITION



Oncology Certification for Nurses

Rapid scientific and technologic advances in cancer care require nurses to know and do more than ever before. In addition, the United States is facing a nursing shortage that is expected to worsen before it improves. This, coupled with the aging population and prevalence of cancer, means fewer nurses are caring for more patients with cancer. Certification provides validation of the specialized knowledge and experience required for competent performance.

The American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) defined nursing certification as the formal recognition of the specialized knowledge, skills, and experience demonstrated by the achievement of standards identified by a nursing specialty to promote optimal patient care (2003). Oncology nursing certification provides tangible evidence that nurses have the knowledge required to effectively provide care to patients experiencing the complex problems associated with a diagnosis of cancer throughout the disease continuum.

The Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation (ONCC) is an independent organization that is affiliated closely with the Oncology Nursing Society (ONS) and the Association of Pediatric Hematology Oncology Nurses. ONCC was founded by ONS in 1984 recognizing that public protection is a goal of professional certification (Nielsen et al., 1996). ONCC certification programs are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies and ABNS. These independent accrediting bodies have established nationally acknowledged standards and criteria for the recognition of certification programs and use rigorous processes to determine whether programs meet their standards (ABNS, 2002, 2003; National Organization for Competency Assurance, 2002). ONCC certifications are based on research (role delineation studies) that is conducted on a regular basis and helps to link the content of the certification examinations (test blueprint) directly to practice (Fabrey, 2008; Montgomery, 2003; Strachle, 2007a, 2007b).

ONCC offers seven oncology nursing credentials. These include the oncology certified nurse (OCN[®]), certified pediatric oncology nurse (CPON[®]), certified pediatric hematology/oncology certified nurse (CPHON), advanced oncology certified nurse (AOCN[®]), advanced oncology certified nurse practitioner (AOCNP[®]), advanced oncology clinical nurse specialist (AOCNS[®]), and certified breast care nurse (CBCN).

It Is the Position of ONS That

- Oncology nursing certification provided by ONCC is sound and beneficial to patients and society at large. ONS encourages oncology nurses to become certified.
- ONCC certification programs are rigorous and meet nationally recognized standards that are reliable and legally defensible measurements of oncology nursing knowledge.
- Regardless of the healthcare setting, certification benefits patients and their families, nurses, and employers. Oncology nursing certification validates that nurses have met stringent requirements for knowledge and experience and are qualified to provide competent oncology care.
- Employers who hire certified nurses, support employed nurses in attaining and maintaining certification, reward nurses who become certified, and inform patients and the public about the certification status of their nursing staff demonstrate their commitment to providing the highest quality of care to patients with cancer throughout the health and illness continuum.

- Healthcare consumers have a right to know the qualifications of those responsible for their care. Nurses should inform patients of their certification and explain its meaning. Certified nurses should display their credentials on their name badges, and employers should support such display (ONS, 2006).

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