

# ADVOCATING FOR REGISTERED NURSE SPECIALTY CERTIFICATION

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Two years ago, the Board of Directors of the Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing (BCEN) embarked on a project to promote registered nurse (RN) specialty certification by advocating its acceptance to meet continuing education (CE) requirements for licensure, as well as for emerging competence initiatives.

BCEN espouses that emergency nursing care and transport nursing care, including pediatric emergency nursing, are vital components of the nation's health care delivery system. Consequently, it is imperative that those nurses entrusted to care for patients in the most vulnerable of circumstances both achieve and maintain certification. Certification of the RN in emergency nursing specialty practice is 1 mechanism for validating the knowledge required to maintain competence.

Emergency nurses earning BCEN credentials have mastered the complex and thorough body of knowledge across the emergency nursing care continuum. Specialty certification for RNs, such as BCEN certification, is a valuable way for nurses to differentiate themselves in the workplace.<sup>1</sup>

RN specialty nursing certification also matters to employers, patients, and fellow nurses.<sup>2</sup> Nurse employers recognize the superior knowledge and critical thinking skills pertaining to emergency nursing that allow employees to be committed to high-quality CE and better patient care.<sup>3</sup>

BCEN endorses the definition of certification adopted by the American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS): "Certification is the formal recognition of the specialized knowledge, skills, and experience demonstrated by the achievement of standards identified by a nursing specialty to promote optimal health outcomes." The BCEN board

strongly believes that certification promotes professionalism and provides patients and their caregivers with the assurance of knowing that these professional nurses have attained the knowledge necessary to provide competent emergency and transport nursing care. Emergency nurses are involved daily in a dynamic, fluid, and rapidly changing environment, making it vital that nurses obtain recognition of their ongoing competency on a continual basis.

To provide nurses with an additional incentive to become and stay certified, the BCEN board initiated its project to promote RN specialty certification by commissioning research on the full landscape of regulatory requirements involving RN specialty certification. Importantly, this research and subsequent advocacy cover certifications of all RN specialties, not just emergency and related nursing practice. BCEN has emerged as a true leader and collaborator among its nursing-certifying peers, a fact that I am most proud of as its chairperson.

The research that was conducted led us to focus our initial advocacy efforts on 5 pilot states: Florida, Virginia, Texas, Oregon, and Missouri. These states were fortunate to have teams of BCEN activists who were willing to lead the charge at the grassroots level in their home states. To provide the necessary training to help accomplish our goal—to promote RN specialty certification by advocating its acceptance to meet CE requirements for licensure, as well as for emerging competence initiatives—BCEN conducted a workshop for these advocates. Among other things, they learned about the various regulatory and legislative issues facing their home states, which could impact the project's success; received training on working with regulators and legislators; and refined key messaging and talking points for use in working in their home states to have certification recognized by their various jurisdictions.

In Spring 2011, BCEN was asked to present its efforts at the ABNS Spring Assembly. This was an important first step in securing other RN specialty certification boards as supporters. The efforts were well received, and by the end of 2011, the project had accomplished the following:

In Florida, BCEN met with the board of nursing to educate its members on using specialty certification to count toward CE requirements; decided to also secure a legislative sponsor to introduce a newly drafted bill to try to accomplish its goal; and worked on creating a coalition of supporters.

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In Missouri, BCEN met with the board of nursing to encourage adoption of mandatory CE requirements for RNs and worked toward incorporation of the goal into Missouri's Future of Nursing Lifelong Learning project.

In Oregon, BCEN worked to interest the Oregon Nurses Association and Oregon State Board of Nursing in allowing specialty certification to count toward CE and obtained initial positive feedback from these groups.

In Texas, BCEN advocates were part of the victory, which now allows certification of RN specialty practice to count as a nurse's continuing competence requirement for renewal licensure. BCEN published 3 statewide articles and spoke at several statewide nursing meetings extolling the new regulation allowing specialty RN certification to be counted toward continued competence requirements.

In Virginia, BCEN met with the Virginia Nurses Association to garner its support. In addition, BCEN met with the Virginia Board of Nursing and received a positive response that the board was interested in accommodating specialty certification as a lifelong learning tool.

In 2012 positive and productive advocacy efforts on the part of BCEN and its representatives were directly responsible for Florida allowing education and courses needed to obtain or maintain certification to count toward the state's CE requirement for RNs. In Texas, the BCEN advocates continued to be a source of information for RNs who may have been unaware that RN certification could be used for satisfying the continued competence requirements, as opposed to more common, traditional CE course offerings. Virginia, though not final as of this writing, was the big 2012 victory, because BCEN efforts paid off and that state will become the 22nd state to recognize certification as a means of satisfying the continued competence/CE requirements. (The state of Virginia has a recent rule awaiting final adoption that will allow RN certification to satisfy the continued competence requirement for RNs.)

In total, 21 states provide a pathway for specialty certification to count toward CE requirements: Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas, Washington, and West Virginia. It should be noted that in Florida, Massachusetts, and New Jersey, the education obtained while one is obtaining RN certification or recertification counts toward CE requirements, not the obtaining of certification itself.

Seventeen states do not have any CE requirements in place for RNs: Arizona, Colorado, Connecticut, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, South

Dakota, Vermont, and Wisconsin. In addition, 3 states do not have a formal requirement for CE but do have requirements for meeting continuing competence requirements: North Carolina, Tennessee, and Wyoming.

As BCEN looks toward the future of this project, 2013 will see a new toolkit emerge to assist BCEN advocates to focus on 1 of 3 pathways:

- Work within states that have CE requirements to formally identify, accept, and publicize specialty certification as a means to satisfy CE requirements.
- Work with the employer community—state hospital associations, for example—to build support for recognizing specialty certification for promotion, salary increases, or recruitment in states where CE or continuing competence is not required.
- Explore regulatory and legislative actions with boards of nursing and state legislators as warranted.

Five additional pilot states will be added this year, and BCEN will begin to formally partner with other ABNS members to use a more formal coalition approach to making grassroots progress. A training session for all advocates is being planned.

BCEN is monitoring the Institute of Medicine's new role related to researching RN specialty certification. The American Nurses Credentialing Center has partnered with the Institute of Medicine to convene and facilitate landmark research into RN credentialing. BCEN will continue to stay abreast of this project on all levels and contribute as warranted.

For further information on this project or to become involved, please do not hesitate to contact me or Tancy Stanbery, BCEN's Chief Executive Officer, at 630-352-0345 or by email at [fstanbery@bcencertifications.org](mailto:fstanbery@bcencertifications.org).

#### REFERENCES

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**Submissions** to this column are encouraged and may be sent to **Kathleen A. Ream, MBA, BA**  
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