

## Position Statement Value of Hospice and Palliative Certification

### Background

Hospice and palliative certification is a process through which the Hospice and Palliative Credentialing Center (HPCC) formerly known as the National Board for Certification of Hospice and Palliative Nurses (NBCHPN®) validates the knowledge an individual has within the specialized area of hospice and palliative care. Certification is an avenue to ensure competent care. Demonstration of competence through certification supports the HPCC mission statement “to advance expert care in serious illness.”

There has been tremendous maturity of hospice and palliative care delivery and research in the last ten years. Many academic nursing programs have incorporated palliative care concepts into their curricula. However, academic degrees alone do not ensure specialty palliative nursing education, knowledge, and expertise. It is essential to reflect this in the education and knowledge of hospice and palliative nurses through certification. The public demands that staff practice in accordance with nationally recognized hospice and palliative standards of care such as the National Consensus Project for Quality Palliative Care *Clinical Practice Guidelines*<sup>1</sup> and the National Quality Forum *A Framework and Preferred Practices for Palliative and Hospice Care Quality – A Consensus Report*.<sup>2</sup> A 2007 study affirms that the two primary reasons for certification are to elevate the profession and to protect the public. Benefits of certification are described by sponsoring organizations, individuals, and employers.<sup>1</sup>

Benefits to an organization that establishes a certification program include:<sup>3</sup>

- Visibility and stature of profession
- Creation, enhancement, and expansion of professional development offerings
- Creation, enhancement, and expansion of academic education
- Better understanding of profession by related disciplines
- Recognition by regulatory bodies
- Visibility of profession within general public

The top three benefits cited by certified individuals were:

- Enhanced credibility
- Personal satisfaction of attaining a goal
- Recognition by peers and professional colleagues

The top three benefits cited by employers were:

- Independent verification of knowledge/competency
- Increased productivity/efficiency
- Higher quality of work

Specialty certification is the most effective way of assuring that a nursing personnel at any level of practice (nursing assistant, licensed practical/vocational nurse, registered nurse, and advanced practice registered nurse) have the knowledge and skills needed to provide safe, high-quality care to the public.<sup>4,5</sup> Certification for other palliative care team members also demonstrates commitment and expertise in the field. It is recognized as one method of demonstrating continuing competence in a specialty area of practice.<sup>6,7</sup> A positive relationship has been found between the proportion of certified nurses on a unit and the feelings of workplace empowerment.<sup>8</sup>

Some studies have demonstrated a positive link between certified nurses and performance outcomes such as:

- Higher patient satisfaction ratings
- Fewer adverse events in patient care
- Increased personal growth and professional satisfaction
- Fewer disciplinary events and fewer work-related injuries
- More effective communication and collaboration with other providers<sup>9</sup>

Certified nurses have a significant impact on patient care and patient safety.<sup>10,11</sup> Studies have identified specific findings indicating improvements in clinical outcomes attributed to certified nurses such as less patient falls, staged pressure ulcers, and shorter length of stay.<sup>12,13,14</sup>

Hospice and palliative nurses participated in a large multi-specialty study of more than 11,400 certified, non-certified nurses, and nurse managers in 2005. Results demonstrated highest agreement that specialty nursing certification enhanced feelings of personal accomplishment, validated specialized knowledge, indicated personal growth, and indicated evidence of professional commitment.<sup>15</sup>

*The Palliative Nursing Scope and Standards of Practice* states that within the area of professionalism, certification is an example of how the hospice and palliative nurse demonstrates knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills that are consistent with palliative nursing professional standards, code of ethics, and scope of practice.<sup>16</sup>

HPCC promotes the delivery of comprehensive palliative care through the certification of qualified members of the hospice and palliative care team by:

- Providing a national standard of requisite knowledge required for certification thereby assisting the consumer, the employer, and members of the health profession in the recognition of the certified hospice and palliative caregiver.
- Encouraging continued personal and professional growth in the practice of hospice and palliative care.
- Establishing and measuring the level of knowledge in hospice and palliative care.
- Formally recognizing those individuals who meet the certification eligibility requirements, and are successful in earning one of the following HPCC nursing credentials:
  - Advanced Certified Hospice and Palliative Nurse (ACHPN®)
  - Certified Hospice and Palliative Nurse (CHPN®)
  - Certified Hospice and Palliative Pediatric Nurse (CHPPN®)
  - Certified Hospice and Palliative Licensed Nurse (CHPLN®)
  - Certified Hospice and Palliative Nursing Assistant (CHPNA®)
- HPCC provides certification to non-nursing health care professionals who meet eligibility requirements and are successful in earning the following HPCC credential:
  - Certified Hospice and Palliative Care Administrator (CHPCA®)
  - Certified in Perinatal Loss Care (CPLC®)

HPCC continues to explore the feasibility of certifications in additional roles to support standards of hospice and palliative care.

### **Position Statement**

The Hospice and Palliative Credentialing Center, Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association, and Hospice and Palliative Nurses Foundation:

- Advocate for certification of the hospice and palliative team members as formal recognition of current standards of care, to be reflective in the care provided to individuals and their families.
- Encourage employers to actively support certification and recertification of their staff through including certification in job qualifications, providing for continuing competence activities, and promoting certification of their staff to the public.
- Support specialty certification as a mechanism to demonstrate initial and continuing competence.
- Serve the certification needs of many roles within the hospice and palliative care team.
- Promote hospice and palliative certification to other disciplines, associations, and influential bodies as the standard to transform the care and culture of serious illness.

## Definition of Terms

*Certification* is a voluntary process by which an organization grants recognition to an individual who has met certain predetermined qualifications or standards.<sup>17</sup> Certification is available to individuals who may perform various roles on the hospice and palliative care team and is based upon the specialized knowledge, skills, and experience demonstrated by the achievement of standards identified within a role. Through the completion of specialized education, experience in a specialty practice, and the successful completion of a qualifying exam or portfolio, nurses and other qualified members of the hospice and palliative care team can achieve specialty certification credentials.

*Maintenance of certification* is accomplished by a variety of mechanisms including demonstration of continuing competence through self-assessment continuing education, professional development activities, and ongoing clinical practice, or occasionally through reexamination. Continuing competence is the ongoing commitment of certificants to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills, and judgment with the attitudes, values, and beliefs required to practice safely, effectively, and ethically in a designated role and setting.<sup>18</sup>

## References

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## Resources

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This position statement reflects the bioethics standards or best available clinical evidence at the time of writing or revisions.

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**Mission Statement:**  
**To advance expert care in serious illness**