



# Position Statement

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## Emergency Nursing Certification

### Description

Emergency nurses play a pivotal role in providing quality care and improving patient outcomes. The nurse workforce consists of people with varying levels of education and experience in specialty areas (Institute of Medicine, 2015). Nurses often seek to distinguish clinical and professional expertise through specialty certification (Bonsall et al., 2018; Garrison et al., 2018). As the healthcare environment is becoming more complex, some healthcare leaders are advocating for specialty certification as a national standard to increase nurses' professional standing and prepare nurses to better meet the specific needs of the patient populations they serve (Stucky & Wymer, 2020). Board certification demonstrates excellence and recognition of the specialized knowledge, skills, and clinical judgement validated by the achievement of standards identified by nursing specialty to promote optimal health outcomes (Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing, 2018).

The first large-scale, rigorous study examining the value of emergency nursing certification to nurses, their patients, and their employers, "The Value of Certification Study," was conducted by the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) and commissioned by the Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing (BCEN®) (Medsker & Cogswell, 2017). Study results were based on survey data from over 8,800 certified and non-certified emergency nurses and over 1,000 emergency supervisors. Outcomes of value from Certified Emergency Nurse (CEN) certification to emergency nurses included the following: higher annual pay, job advancement, employability, and nursing self-efficacy, even after controlling for level of education and years of experience. These results support prior studies that reported specialty certifications in nursing are associated with increased nurse satisfaction and empowerment (Fitzpatrick, 2017; Kitto et al., 2017; Van Wicklin et al., 2020). In the "Value of Certification Study," employers of nurses with CEN certification reported multiple aspects of greater technical performance, accuracy, and ethical behavior for those certified than those not certified (Medsker & Cogswell, 2017). Nurses with specialty certification are more likely to leverage their knowledge and power to make independent clinical judgments regarding the need for patient vital signs and the impact of variation on patient care (Burchill and Polomano, 2016). Further, engaging nurses with CEN in process improvement efforts to reduce hemolysis in blood samples is beneficial as these nurses are likely better informed on evidence-based practices (Burchill, Seballos, Reineks & Phelan, 2021). Researchers found a possible linkage of specialty certification with improved patient outcomes (Boyle, 2017; Coelho, 2020; Fitzpatrick, 2017; Gill, 2018; Kitto et al., 2017; Park et al., 2018; Whitehead et al., 2019).

Certification has additional meaning for advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) as licensure and certification are often linked, forcing certification as a mandate for entry into practice (Russell, 2017; Bonsall et al., 2018; Hoyt, 2017). The APRN Consensus Workgroup supports the link between licensure and certification (Advanced Practice Registered Nursing Consensus Work Group, 2008). The Consensus Model for APRN Regulation outlines the standard accreditation, education, certification, and licensure



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throughout the U.S., with the goal of attaining full practice authority for APRNs (Advanced Practice Registered Nursing Consensus Work Group, 2008).

## ENA Position

It is the position of the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA) that:

1. Specialty certification validates advanced knowledge, competence, and commitment to excellence in emergency nursing.
2. Attainment of emergency nursing certification contributes to the delivery of safe, effective, quality care.
3. Development of validation methods for emergency specialty certification to facilitate the meeting of licensure requirements by APRNs is essential.
4. Practice environments that encourage and facilitate emergency nursing certification and continuing education opportunities promote improved patient outcomes and greater professional satisfaction.
5. Certification and credentials integrated into professional advancement models are a means to recognize specialized knowledge, leadership, and clinical judgment.
6. Healthcare institutions support both the initial certification and renewal certification of their emergency nursing workforce.
7. Nurses who have successfully achieved specialty certification have earned the privilege to use and professionally display credentials following their name, including on their identification badges.
8. Research specific to and regarding the relationship of emergency nursing certification to safe, effective, quality practice, and to both nurse and patient satisfaction is essential.

## Background

In the complex, time-pressured, and dynamic environment of emergency care, emergency nurses engage in continuing education to remain aware of current knowledge and best practices. Specialty certification is a method for validating the knowledge, skills, and competencies unique to specific populations supported by the National Academy of Medicine (formerly the Institute of Medicine) (Institute of Medicine, 2015) and is recognized as a strong benchmark of quality in Magnet-recognized organizations (Kitto et al., 2017). Registered Nurses (RNs) in the emergency setting may attain specialty certification by exam



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through the BCEN as a generalist (CEN), flight nurse (CFRN), critical care ground transport nurse (CTRN), pediatric emergency nurse (CPEN), and trauma nurse (TCRN) (BCEN, 2018).

Certification for APRNs in the emergency setting is evolving. Previously, ENA has collaborated with stakeholders, including the American Academy of Emergency Nurse Practitioners (AAENP) and the National Association of Clinical Nurse Specialists (NACNS), to further establish core competencies and expand opportunities for APRNs in the emergency setting (ENA 2008; ENA, 2011). In 2019, the ENA Position Statement, *Advanced Practice Registered Nurses in the Emergency Setting*, established the importance of APRNs in the ED setting and outlined gaps in national certifications. AAENP developed a strategic partnership with ENA to establish the emergency nurse practitioner (ENP) specialty scope and standards, thereby paving the way for professional certification mechanisms (Evans et al., 2018; Hoyt, 2017). Emergency nurse practitioners may attain an Emergency Nurse Practitioner Certification (ENP-C) through a program offered by the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners in collaboration with AAENP (2020). For clinical nurse specialists (CNSs) who practice in the emergency setting, there is currently no emergency specialty certification method for the CNS APRN role.

Barriers regarding the value of specialty nursing certification include the lack of a universal taxonomy for professional certifications in nursing and the complexity of research that enables merging of nurse, patient, and institution-specific data (Institute of Medicine, 2015; Boyle, 2017). Large scale, generalizable research that examines the value of specialty nursing certification to patient outcomes is complex. It requires the merging of information from large datasets, such as the National Database of Nursing Quality Indicators, which captures nursing- and unit-specific data, with information from others, such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Healthcare Safety Network or the Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems Survey, which capture patient outcome data (Boyle, 2017).

In today's value-based healthcare system, organization payment and, at times, provider compensation are linked to patient quality outcomes, including nurse-sensitive quality indicators. Professional certification benefits the individual emergency nurse, the patients they serve, and the healthcare institution. Existing data suggest that a relationship between certification and patient outcomes exists but is not fully understood and requires further investigation (Biel, Grief, Patry, Ponto & Shirey, 2014). However, the intrinsic rewards of professional certification, such as the sense of competence and empowerment it offers nurses and the credibility it offers healthcare institutions, are well supported by the existing literature (BCEN, 2018).

## Resources

Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing. (2018). *Take your emergency department to the next level with board certified emergency nurses: A special report for ED leaders and hospital administrators*. <https://bcen.org/want-to-take-your-ed-to-the-next-level/>



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