

Certification in Addictions Nursing Promoting and Protecting the Health of the Public

Deborah S. Finnell, DNS, RN, NP, CARN-AP

The Addictions Nursing Certification Board (ANCB) offered the first certification for addictions Registered Nurses (CARNs) in December of 1989 and offered the certification for addictions Registered Nurses at the advanced practice level (CARN-AP) in 2000. The purpose of these certifications is to promote the highest standards of addictions nursing practice. Obtaining the CARN and CARN-AP recognizes the attainment of a level of expertise and commitment in providing quality nursing care in treating addictions. Certification is a post-entry level credentialing. Specifically, the applicant for the CARN must meet the requirements for entry into practice as a Registered Nurse (RN), that is be licensed as a RN. The applicant for the CARN-AP must be a RN who holds the masters' degree or higher degree with documented clinical practice hours at the advanced-practice level.

The American Nurses Association posits that professional self-regulation through certification is important to ensure safe, high-quality services (ANA, 1997). Specialty nursing organizations have been responsible for certification of basic level (e.g., CARN certification) and of advanced practice (e.g., CARN-AP) since the origination certification in the United States some 50 years ago. As the specialty organization for addictions nurses, the International Nurses Society on Addictions' (IntNSA) mission is to be a voice of nurses committed to addressing the impact of addictions in society. As such, IntNSA serves as a leader for nurses and other health care providers for enhancing knowledge and skills in the prevention, detection and treatment of individuals using alcohol and other drugs. Therefore, promoting certification in the specialty of addictions nursing supports IntNSA's mission. In their Report of a State-of-the-Knowledge Conference on U.S. Nursing Certification (Anonymous, 1999) nursing leaders agreed specialty nursing certification should remain within the realm of specialty organizations. These nursing leaders also agreed that nursing certification represents the achievement of a specialized body of knowledge and skills that can only be granted through nursing organizations that represent and continuously review the standard for that specialty area (Anonymous, 1999). The CARN is listed as the only certification for addictions nursing in the "2002 Career Guide" from the American Journal of Nursing (Anonymous, 2002).

Cary (2001) identifies a key purpose of certification is protecting the public from unsafe and incompetent providers. Another purpose of certification is to give consumers more choices in selecting health care providers (Cary, 2001). Specialty certification also provides advantages to nurses, including self-verification of specialty knowledge, increased self-esteem, and increased pay and job security (Anonymous, 1999). Increased pay and job security are only applicable when employers value certification. In her work, International Study of the Certified Nurse Workforce, Cary (2001) concluded that the findings provided initial evidence that certification may give nurses the means or opportunity to practice in a manner likely to improve outcomes. With competition, downsizing, an increased awareness of the public on accreditation and scrutiny by managed care companies and other payors of health care facilities, employers would be

wise to reward nurses who have achieved certification in their specialties. Further research does need to be conducted to confirm that a certified nurse work force contributes to productivity, retention, and positive patient outcomes. However, Brady et al. (2001) point out that certification is a key tool in reducing healthcare errors, in demonstrating to consumers nursing's commitment to ongoing excellence and state-of-the-art care, and in promoting the retention of nurses in the workforce. Retention of competent nurses is critical in the face of the current nursing shortage.

Cary (2001) concludes that there is initial evidence that certification may afford nurses professional growth and financial rewards, such as recognition, reimbursement, salary increases, and career advancement opportunities, as well as the opportunity for personal growth. In Cary's (2001) study, certified nurses attested to increased confidence, competence, credibility, and control. These attributes are those of high-quality caregivers. Certified Addictions Registered Nurses, CARN and CARN-AP, care for individuals across their life-span, their families, and with entire populations. These certified nurses have the potential to reduce the harm to individuals and society related to the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, and other addictions such as gambling. Therefore, employers should financially reward certified addiction professionals registered to demonstrate they value the CARN who promotes the health of those individuals entrusted in their care and the CARN who intervenes to protect the public.

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