



BOARD OF CERTIFICATION FOR EMERGENCY NURSING

Excellence. Achievement. Impact.

American historian Will Durant said: "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

In Pursuit of Excellence: The Trauma Certified Registered Nurse (TCRN)

In February 2026, the Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing (BCEN®) celebrated the 10th anniversary of the nationally accredited and Magnet-accepted Trauma Certified Registered Nurse (TCRN®) certification program — a major milestone for trauma nursing and trauma care. Held by more than 8,700 registered nurses (RNs) in 16 countries as of early 2026, the TCRN has grown into BCEN's second-largest nursing specialty program and remains among its fastest-growing. BCEN has tremendous pride in these bona fide vanguards of trauma nursing. Reflecting on how we arrived at this place, the common thread in the TCRN's history is the pursuit of excellence.

Advancing Trauma Care

Board certification is a high distinction that independently validates specialty knowledge and expertise. In attaining and maintaining board certification in trauma nursing, TCRN-certified nurses demonstrate an ongoing commitment to excellence and an exceptional level of knowledge, experience and clinical judgment across the entire trauma care continuum from prehospital care through rehabilitation and including injury prevention.

Trauma is a major public health issue with universal impact. In the U.S. alone, the annual economic cost of trauma is \$4.2 trillion (including healthcare and productivity loss for those suffering both fatal and non-fatal injuries). Among the other U.S. statistics compiled by the Center for National Trauma Research¹:

- Trauma is the leading cause of death of children in the United States
- Injury is the number one cause of death for people between the ages of 1 and 46.
- Each year trauma accounts for 41 million emergency department visits and 2 million hospital admissions.
- For ages 65 and older, falls are the leading cause of injury deaths and the most common cause of non-fatal injuries and hospital admissions for trauma.
- Trauma is a major cause of military service member injuries and deaths.
- The effect of trauma on productive life years lost exceeds that of any other disease.

Nurses are the largest component of the trauma care workforce. According to the Society of Trauma Nurses (STN), trauma nurses "routinely care for patients who

demonstrate acute and complicated conditions that require a high level of skill and competence to treat,"² and trauma care requires "significant expertise across the entire continuum to make an impact in outcome and prevention."³ Further, STN says skilled caregivers can have "a tremendous positive effect on the outcome after injury as well as the prevention of injuries," which is why STN "believes strongly in the attainment of the TCRN certification and encourages all trauma nurses in all settings to obtain their certification upon meeting the recommended eligibility requirements."³

The hands-on care trauma nurses provide — and the need to critically think, assess for early signs of complications, and intervene quickly, often for unstable patients when every second counts — warrants their having as much knowledge and expertise as possible. It is worth noting that beyond these critical point-of-injury capacities, trauma nurses are also the conductors of trauma care, orchestrating interprofessional teams to rehabilitate each patient back to their full potential. They also are the primary educators aiming to prevent injuries in the first place.

A growing body of research, including BCEN's major large-scale value of certification study,⁴ demonstrates that board-certified nurses are more confident, are better contributors and communicators, and have a deeper impact on patient care, their teams and their organizations.

Therefore, it is fair to say that board certification in trauma nursing is vital to trauma care, and TCRNs play a crucial role in advancing trauma care. Moreover, leaders who want to create and grow exemplary nurses need to know that the optimal professional development path runs through board certification.

TCRN's Beginning & Early Milestones

The TCRN was borne out of excellence seeking in 2010 when the Society of Trauma Nurses held membership-wide conversations to discuss the need and desire for a unique trauma certification. The consensus was a resounding "Yes!" Having decided the wisest course was to partner with an experienced credentialing body to move such a certification toward fruition, STN met with BCEN in 2012 to discuss collaborating to develop a trauma nursing certification program. In 2013, the two organizations established a formal agreement and funded a needs assessment survey. The survey was

distributed throughout and beyond the trauma nursing community and yielded very positive results. Shortly thereafter, in early 2014, the partners commissioned a role delineation study (RDS) whose results confirmed a trauma specialty certification was “viable, feasible, and much needed.”⁵

In October 2014, BCEN moved forward as the sole owner and operator of the TCRN certification program, as planned. From this juncture, the day-in-day-out labor of love of BCEN’s extraordinary “Team TCRN”—our staff, board, item writers and exam construction review committee (ECRC) members—took the TCRN from a program concept to a February 2016 launch. The TCRN was then deemed a Magnet®-accepted certification program in April 2017, and in January 2019, the TCRN program earned initial accreditation by the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC).

Robust Program, Robust Partnership, Robust Future

After 1,334 RNs earned the TCRN in 2016, the year it was introduced, the number of TCRNs rose to 5,000 by year-end 2019 and topped 7,600 by year-end 2023. Today, as the number of TCRNs approaches 9,000, the TCRN is BCEN’s second-largest nursing specialty certification program. TCRN-certified direct care nurses, nurse leaders and administrators, and nurse and community educators are creating innovative injury prevention initiatives, building hospital trauma programs from the ground up, transforming trauma systems, inspiring other trauma nurses to become board certified, and of course providing elite trauma care—all of which helps millions of patients each year overcome injury and tragedy and reclaim productive lives.

In STN’s 2023 “Position Statement on Qualifications and Competencies for the Trauma Program Manager,”⁶ attainment and maintenance of the TCRN credential is specified as an important measure of competency for trauma program managers (TPMs). TPMs are “leaders in their institutions who advocate for the highest level of trauma care across the continuum.”⁶ Underlining RNs’ leadership role in trauma care, STN states: “RNs are uniquely well-suited to serve as TPMs, and trauma programs are best served when RNs hold the TPM role.”⁶

Anchored by shared values, BCEN’s partnership with STN is as robust as ever. BCEN proudly supports the academic pursuits of trauma nurses by annually funding multiple STN scholarships at the undergraduate, master’s and doctoral levels, and STN helps BCEN seek out a top board-certified trauma nurse to be honored with BCEN’s annual Distinguished TCRN award. BCEN actively promotes STN membership to nursing students, incentivizes RN membership in STN through discounts on TCRN initial certification and renewals, and supports various STN initiatives.

In addition to being an ardent advocate for certification,² STN develops first-class trauma educational materials, resources, and tools that help RNs earn and maintain their TCRN status.

Guided by BCEN’s overall mission to develop robust certification exams fostering empowered nurses who contribute noticeably to patient care, safety and outcomes, and building on our support and advocacy for TCRNs and TCRN candidates, BCEN regularly adds trauma CE content to the award-winning BCEN Learn platform. BCEN’s efforts to ensure TCRN program quality and integrity, fund research, and cultivate a global community of support, recognition, mentorship, and inspiration for trauma nurses are ongoing.

As the ranks of TCRN-certified nurses continues to grow, and the story of their impact continues to unfold, the pursuit of excellence will remain the common thread.

References

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