



# Support Your Emergency Nurses to Board Certified Success

**A Step-by-Step Guide**



**BOARD OF CERTIFICATION  
FOR EMERGENCY NURSING™**  
**Excellence. Achievement. Impact.**



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# It Just Takes One

## It just takes one ... one spark or one catalyst, that is.

One nurse leader, one nurse educator, one administrator or stakeholder, one board certified nurse. Just one person who knows the benefits and impacts of specialty nursing board certification can light a fire or take a unit with zero, one or a few certified emergency, trauma and transport nurses and transform it into an emergency nursing powerhouse.

Your facility doesn't have to be a Magnet-recognized institution, a well-funded large hospital, a leading academic center, or a health system to create the basic infrastructure to grow and sustain a certified emergency nursing workforce. And if cost is an issue, facilities and organizations of all sizes have found innovative and creative ways to help fund their emergency nurses' certification journeys.

Certification cultures are emerging and thriving everywhere – from community hospital EDs to leading academic centers, from transport bases to Level I trauma centers, and from children's hospitals to major health systems. While certified success stories come in all sizes, shapes, and varieties, there are certain characteristics and practices they have in common.



In this step-by-step guide, you'll learn the ins and outs of certification support, including:

- the **4 key steps** to creating a culture of certification,
- **expert insights** and **success secrets** from certification advocates across the US, and
- the **benefits and impacts** of board certification.

We've also compiled dozens of certification support ideas, tips and tactics in our [Idea Center](#).

## So, let's get started!



## Step 1:

# Model from the Top ... and Grow from the Inside Out

The most consistent characteristic and common starting point of successful certification cultures is modeling from the top and growing from the inside out.

**‘Top’ doesn’t mean it necessarily has to be a senior official who initiates a certification support program.**

It simply needs to be someone with leadership abilities who will champion the cause, carry the torch, build management buy-in over time, and keep things on track. *Modeling from the top* does, however, mean that nurse leaders who would like their nurses to be board certified ought to achieve this designation themselves.

“Being able to walk the walk is essential,” says Jessica Thomas, MSN, RN, CCRN-K, CNML, CENP, associate administrator, USC-Verdugo Hills Hospital, “because nurses are watching and they say: ‘Why should I undertake this really hard thing if you haven’t done it yourself?’ My best advice for administrators would be to get your own certification. Leadership is its own specialty, so your certification doesn’t necessarily have to be in the same clinical practice area you worked as a bedside nurse.”

**Growing from the inside out can take many forms.**

It might be a single credentialed nurse on a unit whose expanded expertise inspires other colleagues to consider or pursue board certification for themselves. It might be a small group of nurses who prepare for the exam together and their drive to expand their specialty knowledge and expertise goes viral. Or it could be a formal, unit-wide incentive or support program that encourages every nurse to get certified.

However many early adopters there are, enthusiasm around certification tends to become contagious among nursing peers. The impact of certified success on a unit, even from just one nurse, can rather quickly lead to a tipping point that inspires many more nurses to get certified. As a certification culture begins to take hold, the successes can be parlayed into buy-in across stakeholder groups. Oftentimes, other units or sister institutions decide to follow suit. As we describe in our success secrets later in this white paper, the most successful nursing certification support programs grow and evolve to have 360-degree support, including from physicians.

“Emergency care is very unique. That first hour of care across all sorts of problems and all ages defines the specialty – the stabilization, the handoff, the correct diagnosis, and so on. **When you have a nurse who has that sort of ‘Spidey-sense’ that says, ‘Something doesn’t seem right here,’ that is valuable.**

Sometimes a doctor can’t exactly put their finger on what it is but just knows the patient should be admitted, and you really want that second perspective. Over 80% of our patients go home, and that creates kind of a blind spot in emergency medicine. So, you really have to be precise with your diagnosis and treatment plan. **Because doctors don’t get as much one-on-one time with patients, we want nurses to be our beacons when there is a problem.** Doctors are very concerned with quality care and patient safety, and certified emergency nurses close that gap.”



– Tom Scaletta, M.D.  
Edward Hospital



The emergency physicians at Edward-Elmhurst Health are among their emergency nurse colleagues' biggest and most generous supporters when it comes to certification. Tom oversees the continuum of acute, unscheduled care, including the emergency departments, immediate care centers, walk-in clinics and (soon) telemedicine for Edward-Elmhurst Health located in Chicago's western suburbs. The system's emergency and immediate care physicians collectively manage 250,000 cases a year and average in the top decile in patient satisfaction. Tom is also president of Smart-ER.net and a past president of the American Academy of Emergency Medicine (AAEM).

### **Why does it make sense for hospitals to support board certification for their emergency nurses?**

Board certification tells me and others that a nurse has mastered their specialty and the details of patient care. Hospitals want to be the best they can be, and to do that you have to have staff who are the best they can be. The Certified Emergency Nurse (CEN®) encourages you to focus on whatever might have been missing from your initial training and your initial experience, and the more you complete that grid of information, the more you're apt to predict things.

Viewed from the business aspect, hospitals that support nursing specialty certification are not only providing the best care for patients, they are providing safer care, which means you're mitigating risk. It's based on experience, but there is also the fact that you're more confident and paying attention. Certification is a means of creating professional satisfaction because you feel like you've mastered your game. And you want professional satisfaction because it reduces turnover, which costs a lot of money. Also, you're developing internal talent so you don't have to do an external search down the road. The naysayer might say, "Well, why are we going to fund this thing that's perhaps not necessary if the nurse leaves." However, the alternative is if you don't fund it and they don't get their CEN and then they stay.

I think about it as the opportunity cost — that is, there is a cost of not having CENs. A little bit more foresighted CFO, say, who is making a budget decision, if they know that there is a financial impact of not having CENs, might recognize that. What if you could prevent a malpractice claim, or what if your patient satisfaction goes down as a result of patients perceiving that the nurses might not know as much as they should? The bottom line: Hospitals shouldn't hesitate to offer whatever resources are necessary to support certification.

### **What does your physician group do to support certification?**

We initiated "The CEN Challenge," which is an incentive/reward program for nurses to get certified, and then we published it in the AAEM newsletter and elsewhere for other physician groups to consider. We believe in board certification so strongly that we provide a \$1,000 honorarium to newly certified emergency nurses, and when

they recertify they receive \$500. Just that collaborative environment alone improves job satisfaction. I also think we've made a difference for nurses who were on the fence.

Over the past 14 years, we have spent over \$100,000 supporting the value of specialty certification. And to me, it's a small investment when you look at the improved relationships, improved patient safety, and the message of appreciation we're sending. It is worth every penny when it comes to ensuring nurses have the knowledge to care for our patients. Edward emergency physicians are board certified and we believe nurses should be too.

### **Looking at all the ways Edward-Elmhurst supports certification, what outcomes have you seen?**

At Edward, the top leaders in the department are CENs. Edward staff teach free CEN review courses twice a year. There are a lot of CE opportunities throughout the year. There is reimbursement for CEs and the exam. And when a nurse earns their CEN or the CPEN, they make a big deal about it. There's a lot of pride there.

We have over 140 emergency nurses in the Edward EDs, and at 54% and growing, we have one of the highest certification levels of any high-volume comprehensive ED. I think nurses and doctors who come from other places realize there's a big difference. Any culture that promotes education and improvement is going to be a positive culture. There's more respect and I think a lot of that is because the nurses are a level above the non-CENs.

We have a lot of data that is provider-specific, most of it on patient experience. When patients have a positive experience, they're accurate on the fact that they've been taken care of well. They know there was time and attention, they probably talk with friends in healthcare, and they know the right thing was done. So patient experience for me is a surrogate for quality.

CENs are your more motivated and more confident nurses. And while I shouldn't say smarter, because any RN can become a CEN with focus, I would say they are smarter specific to emergency medicine afterwards. Confidence creates a better work environment. Overall, I think every facet of what makes it great for patients, for yourself as a nurse, and for people working with you, is nurtured by the CEN.



## Step 2:

# Build Bridges & Break Down Barriers

Nurses working across the emergency spectrum are among the most dedicated and hard-working RNs. According to the results of the 2019 Emergency/Trauma/Transport Nursing Workforce Survey, over 85% work full-time versus 65% of the overall RN workforce, and nearly one-third hold more than one nursing position versus 17% of all RNs.<sup>12</sup> The physical, mental and emotional demands and challenges faced by RNs working in fast-paced, high-stress, high-stakes emergency, trauma and transport environments are no secret either.

As a result, nurses aspiring to become board certified and stay certified can face an uphill battle. *That's why breaking down barriers and building bridges to certification can make all the difference.*

### What are the top barriers to certification?

According to researchers, they are cost, lack of institutional support, lack of institutional rewards, lack of access to preparation resources, time constraints, and fear (of test taking and failure).<sup>3-5</sup> Organizations committed to building and maintaining a certified nurse workforce have learned by experience that they cannot succeed without lessening or eliminating these barriers.

### Communication is a crucial part of breaking down barriers and building bridges to certification.

"When people talk about it, it becomes something that is talked about all the time. Just asking someone, 'Are you planning to get certified? What can I do to help you?' can help move someone forward," says Clair Barnett, BSN, RN, CEN, CPEN, TCRN, of Good Samaritan Regional Medical Center. "We also have our letters on our badges. So when another nurse looks and says, 'Oh, you have your CEN. What was the test like? How do you like being a CEN?', that starts an open communication and discussion with your peers, and that can be one of the biggest motivators."

Unfortunately, nurses may not be aware of the resources your organization offers — and research bears this out. The results of BCEN's large-scale Value of CEN Certification Research Study<sup>6</sup> as well as BCEN's more recent web-based professional development survey<sup>7</sup> found that nurses are substantially less aware of the professional development and certification resources and supports offered by their organization than nurse leaders are. Certification champions know to maximize awareness and utilization by talking about and keeping these resources front and center in their unit and regularly encouraging nurses to take advantage of them.



### Pro tips:

- Fund or reimburse for certification and recertification fees and continuing education (CE)
- Leverage exam fee discounts offered through professional memberships
- Participate in BCEN's volume discount certification voucher program
- Carve out space and time for study partners to meet
- Encourage certified nurses to mentor certification candidates
- Connect nurses with test anxiety resources
- Make exam prep and CE accessible
- Offer flexible schedules or paid time off for review course and CE attendance and on exam day
- Recognize and reward certification and recertification

"Certified nurses — and this is based on having so many people certify in the past six months — have a greater sense of confidence in their own abilities. **They feel better about their own practice of nursing in emergency medicine. They're able to identify those patients whose conditions are declining much sooner.** I also believe that being certified removes any self-doubt they have about themselves because they've had that proven test of their knowledge and they know that they've got it. **This makes them feel more confident when they collaborate with physicians and allows for better patient outcomes.**"



— Michelle Inglis, RN  
Orlando Health



**Michelle Inglis, BSN, RN, CEN****Learning Specialist, Emergency Department/Level I Trauma Center  
Orlando Health Orlando Regional Medical Center | Orlando, FL**

Michelle spearheads Orlando Health Orlando Regional Medical Center's (ORMC) highly successful push to get ED nurses certified as part of Orlando Health's Magnet journey. ORMC is an adult Level I Trauma Center and teaching hospital with over 100,000 patient visits per year. ORMC's ED, which sees about 300 patients a day in its 75 beds, boasts a 44% board certification rate among its 114 RNs. Remarkably, the number of certified nurses doubled in six months — from 26 in December 2018 to 50 in the ED, including one on the Orlando Health Air Care Team and one in the resource nursing pool by summer 2019. Nine more were registered to sit for their exam by fall 2019.

**Which aspect of certification support has Orlando Health been particularly successful or innovative with?**

Orlando Health had the foresight in 2004 to recognize the need for certification by our nurses. The program that was developed, called Set the Pace, was a way to support and reward RNs for earning any of the national certifications and then mentor someone else to do the same. Each certification candidate mentee and their certified nurse mentor sign a contract in which the mentor agrees to support the mentee through the certification process. This is accomplished through study dates and practicing test questions together as well as providing pointers and tips about the exam. Once the mentee passes the exam, the hospital rewards both nurses with \$250. Staff nurses have the option to mentor up to five nurses a year and receive \$1,250. Currently, all ED nurses at ORMC who are working towards certification are participating in Set the Pace.

**What other ways do you lower the barriers for nurses?**

Most nurses simply don't have the expendable income to pay up front for the exam or purchase the resource materials they need to prepare for it. ORMC pays for initial certification as well as each recertification. Since discovering BCEN's Yes You Can! program, ORMC is now able to bulk purchase exam vouchers. This program enables us to provide our nurses with an exam voucher and a CEN review course for less money than the regular exam fee. The voucher program also streamlines the exam application and scheduling process for nurses and our administrative team members.

ORMC encourages certification by all our nurses — from our leadership team to the bedside nurse. The majority of our certified ED nurses are CEN, but since we are a Level I Trauma Center, I'm preparing to sit for the TCRN to be able to assist interested nurses who would like to prepare for that exam.

In order to meet the individual learning needs of our team members, we offer them an online review course, a review book or sometimes even both, to help them study for the exam. I provide each nurse with a test outline that helps them know what content to focus on. We discuss the need

to be completely prepared prior to taking the exam and we review areas that they need assistance with. With these practices in place, we currently have an 80% pass rate among nurses who have taken the exam.

**What's behind your passion for certification?**

I believe certification improves patient care and allows nurses to practice at the best of their ability. When nurses obtain certification, they are more confident in their own skills and an improvement in patient outcomes is observed. ORMC's journey to Magnet certification is only part of the reason I have embarked on this push for certification by our nurses. The biggest reason is that certification shows a commitment to your nursing specialty, improved patient outcomes, and, for our nurses, it has been such a morale booster.

As emergency department nurses, we only have brief moments to make decisions that are going to affect the outcome of our patients. Collaboration with physicians and other members of the healthcare team is more effective when the nurse is confident in their abilities. That confidence allows our nurses to make the right decisions which in turn provides better outcomes to that patient in that moment. They've always been great nurses; they're better nurses now.

**What incentivizes nurses to stay certified?**

At ORMC our nurses can advance on the clinical ladder (a structured system to provide staff nurses career advancement within the clinical setting) through certification. Certification provides seasoned nurses with an alternative to returning to school and increases their knowledge within their practice.

Recertification is also covered through the Yes You Can! vouchers and makes staying certified so much easier. Aside from the financial benefits, our nurses choose to stay certified because they recognize that certification is a driver behind improved patient outcomes due to increased knowledge and improved practice.



## Step 3:

# Have a Passion for Preparation

There's no two ways about it. Preparing for a board-certification exam is serious business.

Fortunately, there are ample excellent resources for nurses no matter their lifestyle, learning style or pocketbook. There are free flash cards and exam content outlines and relatively inexpensive reference books written by experts in every emergency nursing specialty. There are free quiz apps, modestly priced interactive practice exams, and fee-based, in-person comprehensive review courses for each specialty exam.



### Pro tips:

- Take cert prep seriously
- Set a deadline, make a study plan and stick to it
- Put a support system in place and use it

While studying and passing the exam is ultimately the responsibility of the nurse, there are plenty of supportive actions nurse managers, educators, departments and organizations can take to make a candidate's path to certification as smooth and easy as possible.



### Pro tips:

- Provide basic study resources for every learning style and technology aptitude or preference
- Create a central location for certification information, resources and even studying
- Connect nurses with cert prep and CE class dates and details (and better still, host them onsite)
- Make prep support and encouragement a daily practice

Whether or not a nurse passes on their first attempt, nurses universally remark that just preparing for the exam makes them a better nurse.

One final note: Keep the learning going. BCEN-certified nurses either need to earn 100 CEs or retest every four years to maintain their certification. Make it a priority to regularly encourage certified nurses to accrue CEs and help them set and meet ongoing learning goals. Quick and casual regular check-in chats can yield big dividends.

**“One of the reasons I believe in a fellowship model that culminates in pursuing board certification is that I believe the nursing profession needs to provide pathways to develop careers at the bedside. We do a great job of orienting nurses and making sure we have a safe practice, but then career development at the bedside is really the responsibility of the individual nurse. Historically we haven't had great pathways to move a novice, apprentice nurse toward an expert practice nurse. As a profession, we need to put tools in place that allow nurses to grow as professionals.”**



— Travis H. Beebe-Woodard, RN  
UVM Medical Center

UVM Medical Center's emergency department is a Level I trauma/academic medical center with 45 beds, including 10 specifically designated for trauma and major resuscitation, and an annual volume of 65,000 patient visits. One of the ways UVM Medical Center supports board certification is through a fellowship program, spearheaded by Travis Beebe-Woodard, the recipient of the 2019 Distinguished TCRN Award, with the ultimate goal of having board certified trauma nurses in the trauma bay 24/7.

### **Tell us about UVM Medical Center's fellowship program for emergency nurses.**

It's a 40-hour, 10-week program focused on the initial assessment and resuscitation of traumatically injured patients. Following completion of the fellowship, nurses attend the ATCN (Advanced Trauma Care for Nurses) class, a team-based course taught concurrently while physicians attend the ATLS (Advanced Trauma Life Support) class. The nurses then prepare and sit for the TCRN exam, which is an objective measure of knowledge across the continuum of trauma care, from injury prevention to rehabilitation. Our first cohort of eight nurses, which started in early 2019, had a 100% pass rate for the ATCN class and, so far, a 75% pass rate on the TCRN. Our second cohort of eight nurses is now underway.

This program exists because our institution has established a pathway to certification that has removed every barrier for our employees. Without institutional support, it's a much bigger lift for an individual to achieve certification. Thanks to a collaboration between our union and our nursing administration, we recently implemented a new clinical ladder that includes covering the up-front cost of certification review courses and 24 hours of study time as well as the cost of two attempts at the certification exam through BCEN's discount exam voucher program.

### **What has been the element that has been the most catalytic or game-changing?**

When I came to the UVM Medical Center ER about three years ago, the typical conversation among nurses about board certification was 'Why would you want to do that? There doesn't seem to be a whole lot of value to it.' After we sent a group of early adopters, including me, to a CEN review course and we sat for and passed the CEN, the process of doing that work literally changed the conversation throughout the department.

What I experienced and overheard more often was people talking about patient care, and people talking about conditions and physiology and exploring the connection between physiology and intervention. We are talking about nursing practice, treatment pathways and diagnoses — and questioning the care we give and why we give it. We are asking, does that make sense and is that what the literature says we should be doing? As those provocative conversations became more prevalent in the department,

folks started to engage a little more. And at the same time, nurses had CEN review books out and they were talking about getting certified ... and then many of them earned their certification.

I think, in particular, it was that conversation about the why behind what we do that really ignited the desire to get certified. I think it also helped ease some of the fear around 'Do I really know this stuff?' We have quite a few senior folks who haven't been certified, and we often hear 'I've been doing this for 20 years, why do I need to get certified?' And I say, 'Well, if you've been doing this for 20 years, then why aren't you certified? You know this stuff.' That perspective helped both the more senior nurses and the newer nurses.

The same thing happened with our physicians. Initially, some of them knew what the CEN was, but as pins and badges started to show up on our name badges, and our leadership started to communicate that more staff were getting certified, more physicians supported it.

### **How are things taking off as a result of the fellowship program?**

Our fellows make up what we call our Trauma Corps, which is tasked with quality improvement, staff education, and sometimes research. They are looking at how to bring debriefing into the trauma bay. They are looking at documentation compliance. They have been doing nursing case reviews, and they have been working with trauma surgeons on interprofessional case reviews as an educational vehicle for multidisciplinary staff.

The fellowship is part of a larger program we aim to create — an emergency nursing institute — that would have different modules, including the trauma nurse fellowship. While our inaugural cohort met at our Level I academic medical center where we have a lot of resources, our goal is to take it on the road in some form to allow the greatest exposure to nurses from around our network so that patients from around our region receive the highest quality of care.

The next piece of this work is creating new educational opportunities and leveraging existing educational opportunities to make sure our nurses can easily maintain certification.



## Step 4:

# Recognize, Reward, Repeat

Nurses who become board certified and join the elite ranks of their specialty and the nursing profession deserve to be recognized and rewarded.

**These extraordinarily committed individuals have put in the time and effort to accumulate the requisite knowledge and expertise,** they have prepared for and passed the most rigorous test in their specialty, and they have achieved the nursing profession's highest distinction. They earned this distinction and continue to excel not because they are required to, but because they choose to be the best possible nurse they can be.

As we've described, lack of organizational rewards and lack of organizational support (whether actual or perceived) are top barriers to certification.<sup>3-5</sup> Beyond being the right thing to do, recognizing and rewarding nurses when they earn and maintain board certification are potent ways to demonstrate organizational support and knock down multiple barriers. Perceived organizational support, in turn, is positively linked with important outcomes including job involvement, job satisfaction, desire to remain, organizational commitment and performance.<sup>8</sup>

Recognition honors certified nurses' high achievement and at the same time increases awareness of certification and its value among all stakeholders. Rewards are a tangible demonstration to the certified nurse that the work they do and their expertise are valued by the organization. Rewards can take many forms including financial, career advancement, and special opportunities. Rewards also serve to further inspire and motivate other nurses to pursue certification.



### Pro Tips:

- **Make recognition and rewards meaningful**
- **When you recognize, say it loud and proud**
- **Give the biggest and best rewards you can muster**

The third part of this step, repeat, is where even the most ardent certification supporters admit their organizations fall short — that is, they don't do enough to ensure their nurses recertify.

**Certified nurses consistently say that once they are board certified they don't ever want to lose that status:** so the desire and motivation are there on the nurses' part. Yet, BCEN data indicates that the highest proportion of nurses who fail to recertify do so at their first certification expiration date.

But it doesn't have to be this way. Nurse managers or educators, for instance, can schedule regular check-ins with certified nurses to see if they are on track for recertification during that first four-year cycle. That simple partnership alone can be a critical factor in ensuring nurses maintain their hard-earned credentials.



### Pro Tips:

- **Keep the certification conversation going by asking nurses to share their expiration dates and incorporate recertification progress reports in their performance reviews**
- **Promote, fund and/or host CE opportunities**
- **Make sure to recognize and reward recertification**

When you recognize, reward and repeat, you create a virtuous cycle that protects the nurses' and your organization's initial investment and allows the value and benefits of certification to compound over time.

When Jessica came on board as emergency services director of the 30,000-annual-patient-visit hospital in fall 2015, there were no certified emergency nurses working in Verdugo Hills' 12-bed ED. A focused certification initiative kicked off in January 2017 and over the next 18 months, the unit went from zero to 12 certified nurses, with more on deck. This initiative resulted in national recognition by BCEN in 2018. In her current role, Jessica serves as associate CNO and continues to oversee Verdugo Hills' ED.

### **Who benefits when emergency nurses get board certified?**

I can tell you from my own experience that having your credentials on your badge is really an awesome conversation opener with patients. They say, 'Oh, you're Jessica and you're a nurse, and what are those letters after your name?' Then they say: 'I have an expert taking care of me.' It instills trust, and that's important for patients so that they feel like they're well cared for.

Board certification is important because it is the validation of someone's knowledge, and that really is something. It's really gratifying for a nurse to be able to attain this achievement and be able to say, 'Wow, I took this really difficult exam, I passed, and this certification means I'm really expert at what I do.' It is important for an organization as well, because if we can attract and retain the best and the brightest who are validated because they are board certified nurses, we don't just get to say we've got the best nurses, we can actually prove we really do have the best nurses.

### **Where did Verdugo Hills start, how do you keep it going, and what is "The Call"?**

The fundamental piece is a question of priority. If certification is a priority for you personally or for a department or an organization, you will infuse that in your policies and procedures, you will infuse that in the vernacular of your department, in the things that you talk about, the things you highlight. We also have an extraordinarily supportive CNO who is a specialty certified nurse, so she inserts that whenever she has the opportunity. So, it's a matter of first setting the priorities and then setting the constellation of tactics around that.

I don't think that I can underscore too much the importance of role modeling. Being able to walk the walk is essential because nurses are watching and they say: 'Why should I undertake this really hard thing if you haven't done it yourself?' My best advice for administrators would be to get your own certification. Leadership is its own specialty, so your certification doesn't necessarily have to be in the same clinical practice area you worked as a bedside nurse.

Verdugo Hills is very fortunate in that USC has made a lot of investments and commitments for nursing excellence,

including instituting bonuses for specialty certification. We give certified nurses a \$1,000 bonus when they first get certified and a \$500 bonus when they recertify. In terms of lower cost perks, we have a plaque in our ED waiting room, and when someone passes their exam, I do an email blast to the team and we do a pizza party, usually with ice cream.

And then there's a call. Recently, one of our newer nurses, Amanda, passed her exam, and that became a call: 'Okay, Amanda just passed, who's next? Who's next? Are you next?' So, it's about keeping that positive peer pressure going along with continual recognition. I do a newsletter for the department and there's a certification corner featuring whoever earned their certification recently and who's studying.

When we have an upcoming CEN review, I am always saying, 'Okay, who's going to be there? We need you there in that seat! Are you going to be there? This person's going to be there. We now have certified nurses who are saying, 'I'm going to work on the day of the class so that somebody can go and we can still cover the department.' This pay-it-forward spirit was started by our early adopters who have been amazing cheerleaders.

### **What impacts are you seeing?**

For the third time since I've been here, we are looking at our triage process and determining where decision-making is happening, where can errors happen and where we can be more efficient. We have a mix of certified nurses and non-certified nurses in the work group that is evaluating how we can shave our time, increase safety and quality for our patients, and increase patient and staff satisfaction. In my observations of this iterative process, the certified nurses have more insight and they speak up more than their non-certified counterparts. While I can't say they are, say, 40% more likely to speak up in a group setting, I can say that these nurses who have gone through the process of specialty certification are definitely more engaged, more willing to speak up, more willing to make a difference in their work environment, and more apt to advocate for patients and highlight problems and differences. Also, they are not just the ones who highlight the problems, they bring solutions.



## Secrets of Success

We asked certification support experts what one piece of advice, be it general or specific, they'd most like to share about building and sustaining a culture of certification.

Here are their success secrets:



**Do What Works  
for Your Needs  
and Environment**

**Don't Reinvent the Wheel When Building  
Educational Objectives & Resources**

**Get Nursing and  
Physician Leadership  
on Board**

**Be Creative  
When Looking  
for Funding  
Sources**

**Start  
Small and  
Build Out  
from There**

**Identify and Enlist  
Other In-house  
Champions and  
Educational Faculty**

**Create a Central  
Resource Center**

**Encourage  
Study Buddy  
and Mentor  
Relationships**

**Communication Isn't  
a One-Walk Dog**

**Don't Stop Once  
They're Certified**





**Chris Chmura, MSN, RN, CEN**

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**Jason Malia, MHA, BSN, RN, C-NPT, NEA-BC**

Clinical Program Director, Emergency, Perioperative, Primary Care and Transport Services  
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**Ashley O’Bryan, MSN, RN, CEN**

Service Line Educator, Pediatric Emergency Department  
Yale New Haven Children’s Hospital | New Haven, CT

Support for certification is really starting to take off at Yale New Haven Health, where over 20% of 200 emergency RNs are certified across three mixed/adult hospitals. Most hold the CEN and increasingly more are interested in the TCRN. At the nationally recognized Yale New Haven Children’s Hospital, 55% are board certified with a goal to have 80% certified by the end of 2020 and CPEN is the preferred certification for ED nurses.

**Tell us about the supports and impacts across Yale New Haven’s three mixed/adult EDs?**

**Chris:** One of the impacts of certification is that CENs stay in their position longer because they have ownership. So they are not going to other practice areas. From a practice standpoint, CENs are the higher level, critical and global thinking nurses that you never have to question. They are all high performing and high functioning. They advocate for patients and they advocate for what is clinically correct and make decisions based on practice standards, which is particularly important in a teaching environment. In our community hospital, where there are less resources, I rely on CENs to really step up.

Certification is an investment. And if you want to invest in nursing, certification is a good way to keep or attract staff. By having certified nurses, the hospital demonstrates excellence and the nurses stay in their position. We believe in it and its importance and it’s really not that much money overall. Funding is set aside to support certification, which leads to better prepared nurses.

We offer a free CEN review class, coordinated and led by our own ED nurses, once or twice a year to nurses across our delivery network, and we also provide review books. We pay for initial exams as well as recertification fees, so there is no out-of-pocket expense to get or keep a certification. Because it has increased our certification rates, we use the BCEN voucher program. We know test anxiety and fear of failure is a legitimate problem, so if you don’t pass the exam the first time, you can use another voucher to take it again. Nurses who earn their board credential get a \$700 one-time bonus.

**How has the thinking around certification evolved and what supports have been most effective in Yale New Haven’s pediatric ED?**

**Jason:** In the very beginning, people were either becoming certified because they really wanted to be certified or because we were telling them to for promotions or job requirements. I think that has changed a bit. People are much more in tune with their career and with the knowledge they want to validate. It is contagious to have a few nurses sign up, especially with how easy it is through the BCEN prepay program. We mostly promote the CPEN certification, which is most in line with what our nurses are practicing. Since we started implementing the voucher program, the number of people who want to take the exam has grown immensely. For our staff members’ first certification, they receive a one-time bonus, which is a nice way to say congratulations. We now also have a recognition area that Ashley has dreamed up with pictures of all the staff with their names and certifications presented in a very design-friendly way in one of our public spaces in the ED.

**Ashley:** We have nurses with two to 40 years of experience studying to sit for the exam right now. I think the biggest thing that helps is having a library for people to use for studying and just giving them that motivating push to say ‘You can study for this. I’ve got the resources, and you can do it.’ I encourage the nurses to really take ownership of their career and reach for everything that they can, and I think certification is a good goal for people to look to. To help family members be aware of certification, our marketing department is working on a family-friendly write up that explains what certification is, and with the nurses’ pictures there, I think that will be eye-catching for families.



# The Benefits and Impacts of Board Certification

Board certification benefits nurses, patients and organizations in a multitude of ways.<sup>9,10</sup>

## Nurse Benefits

- Greater knowledge & confidence
- More empowered to make decisions, which increases job satisfaction
- Higher pay & greater career success
- Competitive advantage for jobs & promotions
- Personal & professional pride
- Respected by peers and colleagues

## Patient & Organizational Benefits

- Validated specialty knowledge & critical thinking, based on rigorous national standards
- Contribute to improved patient outcomes
- Stay current on latest advances & best practices
- Anticipate hazards & promote safety
- Higher technical performance & commitment to accuracy and ethics
- Have the know-how and interest to solve problems

**Emergency services directors from east to west are witnessing and facilitating these and other positive outcomes and impacts as the number of board certified emergency, trauma and transport nurses rises.**

Here are just two of the many success stories:

### EXPERT INSIGHTS

**Patrick Cassell, MSN, RN, CPEN**

Director, Emergency Services

Orlando Health Orlando Regional Medical Center | Orlando, FL

Orlando Health Orlando Regional Medical Center (ORMC) is an adult Level I trauma center and teaching hospital with over 100,000 patient visits per year. ORMC's ED, which sees about 300 patients a day in its 75-bed ED, boasts a 44% board certification rate among its 114 RNs.

### **What are the impacts of supporting board certification and having a substantial portion of board certified emergency nurses on staff?**

Supporting certification helps with your retention, your quality, your patient care and your recruitment efforts.

Because we support board certification, we have the best of the best working here, the experts in the field. We make sure that we support our nurses, and we're constantly looking at growth and development, succession planning, continued education and nurse retention. We're cultivating such a positive environment that nurses don't want to leave. Our nurses have autonomy and the respect of our physicians, and I think that impacts retention, too.

For recruiting experienced nurses, we want nurses who want to make care better for our patients and who want to be excellent clinicians. We want to grow leaders, so we want people who are really going to be owners in our department. Nurses who are owners and future leaders are attracted by the fact that we have more certified nurses. They want a department that will support them in their growth and development.

From a new grad recruitment perspective, we can let new grads know they're coming to a place where we have the most skilled emergency nurses around. Board certification is a concrete indicator of the skill level of your staff. We can say things like 'You're coming to a place where we have the

best and most skilled board certified emergency nurses,' and 'We can give you the foundational experience for your career and everyone around you will be a resource for you.'

Certification validates that nurses are experts in what they are doing, and that transfers to the way they interact

with residents and the way that they interact with their peers, with new nurses, and with me as a leader. I think certification is an absolutely crucial step for people who are committed to a specialty and core to retaining skilled, experienced nurses.

### EXPERT INSIGHTS

#### Dustin Bass, MHA, BSN, RN, CEN, NE-BC

Director of Emergency Services  
Carson Tahoe Health | Carson City, NV

At Carson Tahoe Regional Medical Center, a 159-bed hospital with 24 emergency bays and a five-bed patient observation unit, over 46% of the emergency department RNs are board certified. Carson Tahoe is an innovator when it comes to financing certification support. The hospital rewards certified nurses with a 2.5% salary increase, the hospital's ladies' auxiliary funds exam vouchers, practice exams and study materials, and the Carson Tahoe Health Foundation offers annual exam fee scholarships.

**Over the past two years, you've seen engagement in the ED improve from 20% to 89%, turnover is low and patient satisfaction scores continue to go up. What role has supporting nurses to prepare for the CEN exam played?**

The great thing that leaders can use to their advantage is the fact that to get the CEN you have to study for it. And instead of putting the onus completely on the individual, what you can do is encourage group studying efforts. We did that by purchasing study materials and getting groups together formally and informally so that they started to develop relationships. We all know that once a team starts to develop relationships both on and off the unit, that can translate into better teamwork and then better patient outcomes and then lower turnover.

We even expanded the group by asking some of our physicians to come in and help lecture on some of the topics that we felt the physicians were really strong on that are also covered on the exam. They focus on cardiac,

abdominal, and respiratory – and those are the top three we see in the ER and they're the top three things on the CEN exam. By having a physician come in and share their knowledge base on certain topics that are not only relevant to the exam but are also relevant to the practice in the department, it's relevant to the team as a whole.

All we did was put together the CEN study group and include the physicians, but by doing that we've created comradery, buy-in and excitement around getting your CEN while boosting knowledge, collaboration, communication and teamwork.

Then whenever nurses get their CEN, we celebrate it, we make it a big deal, and our CNO sends them a letter and celebrates it with them. That celebration, that public recognition, makes you feel confident and excited and proud of what you're doing and proud of your department and your teammates who also passed the exam. For us, it's become about much more than just the exam.



## Idea Center

We polled the most successful certification advocates we know — plus nearly 1,500 BCEN-certified nurses, candidates and nurse leaders<sup>7</sup> — about how they support certification. Here are 10 top ways nurse leaders, managers and educators can inspire and encourage, prepare, recognize and reward, and help fund board certification.



## Motivation Magic | Ways to encourage, inspire and motivate



### LEAD BY EXAMPLE Be certified yourself

Link certification with benefits to patients



Listen to and get to know your nurses (their ideas, interests, needs, wants, challenges)

Remind them of the many “whys” they are a nurse

Encourage in person or in a personal note/Give positive feedback/Praise successes

Be kind when they are struggling/  
Support them during difficult shifts



Be with them at the bedside/  
Daily rounding

Set unit certification goal

Create a friendly competition on your unit or across the organization

Integrate into performance reviews (make certification a goal)

## Cert Prep Palooza | Help your nurses apply and prepare for the exam



Create a timeline and study plan that works for them/Check on their progress

Show them BCEN’s test anxiety resources

Annual education stipend

Pay for or reimburse for certification exam, buy vouchers

Hold monthly lectures and invite physicians to speak/Help them learn at the bedside

Host or pay for review course, CEs, certificate classes



Study buddy/Mentor program/Facebook group

Make space for a Resource Center with study materials and review course/CE dates

Create a unit-based professional development council

PTO or flexible shift to study, take exam, attend classes

## Super Celebrations | Recognize this major career milestone



<b>Have a Party</b>  Bring on the Food <b>meal, pizza, ice cream, chili cook-off</b>	Recognize them on the unit, in huddle, by email, on celebration bulletin board, in article or note in hospital newsletter		Press release to local media/ Share on social media
	Special day to celebrate them (with optional superhero cape)/Extra day off		
Wall of Excellence (plaque on unit, in waiting room, in hospital main lobby)	Yearly certification dinner or celebration day/Celebrate Certified Nurses Day (March 19)		
		<b>Update name badge to include certification/Badge bling</b>	

## Rich Rewards | Acknowledge their expert status and value



Annual bonus as long as nurse stays certified (\$300-\$2,000, for one or multiple certifications)		Eligible for leadership roles	Eligible for special projects	Certification required for certain positions and/or promotions
One-time or annual salary increase (1%-2.5%; \$.25-\$2.50/hour for one or each certification)	Advance on clinical ladder	One-time bonus when nurse gets certified (\$500-\$2,000)		
		One-time bonus for recertification		
Scheduling preference for a week of their choosing				

## Find the Funding | Creative ideas to fund a certification culture



<b>Make certification support part of the operating budget</b>			Take advantage of exam discounts through ENA/STN/ASTNA membership or BCEN's voucher program	
Offer annual scholarships	Award support through a lottery	Approach physician groups		
Certified nurses on unit can start a scholarship fund (every dollar helps)			<b>Ask your hospital's foundation, ladies' auxiliary and major donors for support</b>	
Appeal to community organizations (e.g., VFW, Rotary, women's giving circles)				



# Overcoming Objections

A board exam is a tough exam, and sometimes there are tough conversations to be had. Here's a guide to help you navigate through them.<sup>†</sup>

## Objection + Strategy

### **I'm too old. I've been doing this too long. I don't need it.**

You might think someone who says this really has their heels dug in — conversation over. But there are ways to turn 'I'm too old' on its side with a combination of genuinely stroking their ego and helping them get to the place of: 'Yeah, I do know this and I do want to get credit. I've got street cred and I want to be able to advertise that.'

### **I'm not ready. I haven't done this for very long, so who am I to try to get a certification? OR People will say, 'Who does this whipper-snapper think they are?' I think I'll wait a bit.**

These are the folks you tell now is the best time.

### **I can't afford it. It's too expensive.**

Not every organization can or does provide financial supports. If you include buying a book and the cost of a review course, the cost of certification can add up to a significant outlay in a short period of time. Being able to say 'Yes, you should do this, and you should spend X dollars of your hard-earned money to do it' can be a tricky conversation to have.

### **I didn't pass the exam. It's too hard. I can't do it. I'm so done.**

When a nurse is feeling like a failure, it's okay to let them mourn a little; that's natural. But don't wait too long to help dust them off and encourage them to take it again.

## Ways to Say It

'Yeah, you're a XX-year nurse, you've seen it, you know it. But you know what? You ought to get credit for what you know.'

'Yeah, but how does anybody really know that you know what you know by looking at you? We can't tell how amazing you are just by looking at you, but we would be able to know how amazing you are if we could see your board credentials on your badge.'

'You're done with school, and that's awesome. You've done the heavy lifting of the first couple of years of nursing which are really, really tough. So now you know what you know, you've got a lot of confidence, and it's time to take the next step and validate that knowledge. And yes, you don't know everything, and I don't know everything, and you're not going to know everything. But there are tools and resources to help you to pass the test. You're never going to be done learning, and this is a great way to open that up and keep the learning going.'

This is where being certified yourself can make the difference. First, speak to the personal gratification you got for having validation in your profession. Then help them identify financial resources such as scholarships for review courses and CEs and exam fee discounts.

'Tests are hard, and this really stinks. You know, not everyone passes the first time. Give yourself some time to heal, but I know you know this, you know you know this, and we both know you can do it. We've got your back, and we'll help you.'

<sup>†</sup>With very special thanks to USC Verdugo Hills' Jessica Thomas for sharing how she navigates these tough questions.





## Reap the Rewards: Resources at the Ready

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Creating and sustaining a culture of certification begins with a spark that ignites, takes hold and burns brighter and stronger over time. Of all the insights, tips and pieces of advice, perhaps the most important is this: Do what works best for your nurses, your unit and your organization.

When you meet the passion for excellence and professionalism of emergency, trauma and transport nurses committed to board certification with meaningful support, recognition and rewards, everyone will reap the benefits.

BCEN offers an array of resources for nurses pursuing specialty certification in adult/mixed emergency, pediatric emergency, critical care ground transport, flight and trauma care and for the managers and organizations who support them.

[BCEN resources](#) include:

- [candidate handbook](#)
- [study plan reference guide](#)  
(with links to exam content outlines and study resource reference lists)
- [full-length practice exams](#)
- [test anxiety resources](#)
- [white papers and slide decks](#)
- [certification research highlights](#)
- [one-page certification fact sheets](#)

Also available are the new [Make Your Case Kit](#) for nurses and the [Support Your Nurses Kit](#) for managers. BCEN's popular [Nurse Recognition Kit](#) includes posters, note cards, and PR and social media templates to help you recognize certified nurses and share your facility's commitment to emergency nursing excellence inside your organization and throughout your community.

BCEN's Yes You Can! Get Certified [volume discount exam voucher program](#) is now available to individuals as well as organizations, and the vouchers may be used for initial certification or recertification. Anyone or any organization — whether a single facility, a hospital network or health system, or a group of nurses committed to taking their expertise and the care delivered at their workplace to the next level — can purchase as few as three exam vouchers at a time at a fraction of the full-price fee.

### About BCEN

The independent, not-for-profit Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing (BCEN®) develops robust certification exams fostering empowered nurses across the emergency spectrum who contribute noticeably to patient care, safety and outcomes. Throughout 2020, BCEN will celebrate 40 years of emergency nursing board certification excellence, achievement and impact.

Over 54,000 BCEN board certifications are currently held by registered nurses who specialize in emergency, flight, critical care ground transport, pediatric emergency and trauma nursing. BCEN offers the Certified Emergency Nurse (CEN®), Certified Flight Registered Nurse (CFRN®), Certified Pediatric Emergency Nurse (CPEN®), Certified Transport Registered Nurse (CTRN®) and Trauma Certified Registered Nurse (TCRN®) certifications. The CEN, CFRN, CPEN, and TCRN certification programs are accredited by the Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC), the only accrediting body specifically for nursing certifications. Learn more at [bcen.org](http://bcen.org). Follow BCEN on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Instagram](#).

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