

## Certification vs. Certificate – What’s the Difference?

Earning a **professional credential**, such as those offered through BCEN’s CEN®, CPEN®, CFRN®, CTRN® and TCRN® **certification programs**, and completing **certificate programs**, such as ACLS, PALS, ENPC and TNCC, are critical to the work emergency nurses do. However, there are significant differences between the two.

	Certification Programs	Certificate Programs
<b>Purpose</b>	Validate knowledge, skills, and expertise across entire specialty practice area.	Learn, practice or demonstrate knowledge or proficiency in a focused topic, subject or skill set.
<b>Outcome</b>	Professional credential signifying the individual is board certified in a specialty.	Certificate or proof of completion card and/or CE hours.
<b>Essential to Safe and Professional Practice</b>	Yes	Yes
<b>Awarding Organization</b>	Independent credentialing bodies	Varies
<b>Nationally Recognized</b>	Yes	Most
<b>Portable</b>	Yes	Varies. Nurses may be required to take employer-sponsored or employer-approved offering.
<b>Eligibility Requirements</b>	Strict and nationally standardized. Most require RN licensure, as well as relevant direct or indirect clinical experience. <sup>1</sup>	Varies. Clinical experience or RN licensure may or may not be required.
<b>Preparation/Course of Study</b>	Independently designed. Spans weeks or months. Prep materials and review courses developed by professional associations and dedicated certification prep providers.	Class or course offered over several hours to several days, in person or online. Content can vary by instructor and/or provider.
<b>Culminates in Exam or Practicum</b>	Yes.  Rigorous, comprehensive, nationally standardized exam, offered in a secure testing facility.  Based on national role delineation studies to ensure relevance to clinical practice specialty area.  Psychometrically sound and legally defensible.	Sometimes.  Content can vary. Test or practicum hosted by sponsoring organization and/or offered online.
<b>Renewal/Recertification Frequency &amp; Requirements</b>	Every 4 years, on average. <sup>1</sup>  Retake certification exam or accrue required continuing education (CE)/contact hours.	Renewal frequency varies.  May be used toward certification program CE requirements.
<b>Eligible for Accreditation by ABSNC<sup>2</sup> or NCCA<sup>3</sup></b>	Yes.  Accreditation by these independent, third parties validates the certification program has met recognized national and international credentialing industry standards.	No.  Certificate program/CE providers may be accredited or sanctioned by industry organizations or certificate program sponsor organizations.

Compiled by the Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing (BCEN®). Updated 07/2020.

<sup>1</sup>American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) Member Organization Annual Survey Data, 2019.

<sup>2</sup>Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certifications. <sup>3</sup>National Commission for Certifying Agencies.