

114: SEEKING QUALITY MEASURES OF CERTIFICATION FOR NURSES

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Objective:

To examine the impact of the certification process on the career development, performance, personal development, and practice changes of nurses in the US and Canada and to describe its relevance for quality measures and policy development.

Methods:

The International Study of the Certified Nurse Workforce sponsored by the Nurse Credentialing Research Coalition contains the largest data set on certification, based on random sampling and a return from 19,452 nurses from the US, US territories, and Canada. Survey data was collected by the International Sample Survey of Certified Registered Nurses from certified nurses to who described their responses within the four dimensions of a certified workforce- personal, professional, career and practice characteristics. Descriptive statistics were applied to the data and the data was compared with the government- sponsored survey data of all registered nurses.

Results:

Results provide initial evidence that certification may provide nurses the means and opportunity to practice in a manner likely to improve outcomes. Almost all respondents reported that certification brought at least one change in their practices and 72% reported one or more benefits of certification. Major findings included higher workforce retention; higher salaries; improvement in safe practices; higher levels of professional attributes - growth, confidence, accountability, satisfaction, credibility and competency; and, improvements in autonomy, control and communication. Forty(40) % or more of respondents experienced fewer adverse incidents (errors) in patient care, felt more confidence in their ability to detect early signs and symptoms of complications, initiated early and prompt interventions with patients experiencing complications and received higher patient satisfaction ratings.

Conclusions:

During the 30 years that professional certification has been available to nurses, little evidence has been amassed to determine its effects. Quality indicators of the value of certification remain embryonic. Until now we have lacked the evidence about who seeks certification, why, and how certification affects those who receive it. Now that both patients and employers are seeking ways to assess the quality of health care providers, characterization of the certified nurse workforce is increasingly important. Certified nurses' reports of early interventions for complications are particularly important quality measures for the industry and policy makers. Solutions and approaches to personnel shortages need to look beyond the "body count" approach in order to bridge the gap between the type of provider (regulatory assurance for quality) and the number of providers to meet a population need. Certified nurses are unevenly distributed demographically and the supply may not match the demand. The case for more certification research is clearly congruent for data-driven policy.