



ONCC Statement on Continued Competency

Measuring competency, as well as continued competency, in a nursing specialty, is an ongoing challenge for all credentialing boards. The National Council of State Boards of Nursing (1996) defines competence as “the application of knowledge and the interpersonal, decision-making, and psychomotor skills expected for the practice role, within the context of public health, safety, and welfare.” The ONCC Board of Directors supports the use of a written examination to measure both initial and continuing knowledge because the test is a valid, reliable, objective, legally defensible measure. A written test provides information as to whether or not a nurse can use a knowledge base to make appropriate clinical decisions.

Since the inception of the first OCN® Examination in 1986, the ONCC Board of Directors has considered the measurement of continuing competency a priority and discussed this issue during almost every Board meeting. A task force of the ONCC Board of Directors, convened in 1989, conducted an extensive review of certification renewal practices of various subspecialties in nursing, medicine, and other health related professions. Based on this review, and an assessment of the development of new knowledge in the specialty of oncology, the ONCC Board determined that certification should be renewed every four years. This same rationale provides the basis for conducting role delineation studies at least every five years. The policy on Continued Competency has been revisited by the ONCC Board of Directors on a regular basis since 1990.

For the first decade of certification renewal, the Board of Directors required that candidates pass the written examination every four years to renew certification. Because examinations can be anxiety-provoking, candidates consistently requested an alternate renewal method.

Following extensive research, debate, and discussion, the decision was made by the Board of Directors to offer renewal of certification through the accrual of points in various professional areas. Although the Board believed the written examination provided the best measure of a candidate’s competency, it also noted that more than 95% of OCN® renewal candidates consistently passed the examination over a 10-year period. After researching the renewal options of many other certification organizations, the Board developed a system for renewal of certification wherein the certified nurse has the option of providing evidence of professional development through the Oncology Nursing Certification Points Renewal Option (ONC-PRO). Candidates utilizing ONC-PRO are required to submit documentation that they have accrued a minimum number of points through continuing nursing education, continuing medical education, academic education, publications, presentations, precepting students in academic programs, or volunteer service during a specified period of time. (For specific information, please see the booklet *Understanding Your Oncology Certification Renewal Options*, available through ONCC).

The ONCC Board of Directors strongly believes that the accrual of points, through continuing education or other activities, should support specialty certification. Therefore, renewal of certification through ONC-PRO requires that the majority of points accrued be within the specialty of oncology nursing. Continuing education credits also must meet the standards of a recognized accrediting body to maintain the quality of the education.

In recognition that current practice also contributes to the maintenance of competence, current practice hours are also required for recertification, in combination with ONC-PRO or successful retest. Those candidates who do not have current practice hours must meet ONC-PRO requirements AND successfully retest to recertify.

The Board recognizes the stress of retesting as well as the diligence required to obtain ONC-PRO points. Recertification policies have been reviewed by Board assigned task forces twice since 2000, and both task forces maintained that four years is an appropriate time frame in which to require recertification, the options of retest or ONC-PRO are reasonable alternatives, and that the requirements of 100 ONC-PRO points for basic certification and 125 ONC-PRO points for advanced certification are rigorous, yet attainable requirements. The Board will continue to keep abreast of new developments in methods to assess continued competence. Maintaining the integrity and legal defensibility of the credentials offered by ONCC while meeting the needs of the certified nurses remain priorities.