How Certification Changed My Career
Amy Evers, BSN, RN, OCN®

My journey into the oncology-nursing field started relatively recently. I spent eight interesting years working for the Department of Defense (DoD) in the nuclear policy arena. Through my work at the Pentagon, I started volunteering with the wounded veterans at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center and realized that my real passion was patient care. I was accepted into Georgetown University’s Accelerated Second Degree BSN program, and planned on working for the Department of Veterans Affairs after graduation. Plans changed quickly for me when my then 31-year-old husband was diagnosed with stage 3b colon cancer midway through my first year of nursing school. The care he received from each oncology nurse he encountered throughout his treatment and recovery was phenomenal, and I knew almost immediately that I had found my calling. I started my career on a surgical oncology unit specializing in cytoreductive surgery, then moved to a smaller community hospital closer to my home in the Washington, DC suburbs. I left bedside nursing in February 2016 to join the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO), where I am now the acting Associate Director for the Quality Oncology Practice Initiative (QOPI®) Certification Program. Our program is a three-year certification granted to outpatient oncology practices that have demonstrated compliance with the QOPI® Certification Standards, a subset of the ASCO/ONS Chemotherapy Standards. The Standards reflect best practice in chemotherapy ordering, preparation and administration, as well as staffing and chart documentation. My decision to leave bedside nursing did not come lightly, and I owe it in part to my OCN® credential.

Our tiny tight-knit oncology department was very protective of our oncology patients, and we worked together as a team to provide the best care we could. Because my background was mostly in surgical oncology, I had a steep learning curve when I transitioned to our primarily medical oncology floor. At times, we were almost a mini ICU and inpatient hospice at the same time. Thankfully, I had great mentors on my unit and nurse navigators working in our hospital system, all who were oncology certified, who demonstrated the type of expertise I wanted for myself. Their demand for excellence helped shape the quality of care I gave to our patients, and I knew I needed to step up my game.

In the months I used to prepare for the OCN® exam, I was constantly amazed by the things I learned about quality oncology care. My own understanding of oncology

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Vote for Your Next Certification Board Member

You may not know their names, but one of three nurses will soon join the ONCC Board of Directors. Will it be Kathy Kearney, BSN, RN, OCN®, MBA; Anna Vioral, PhD, MEd, RN, OCN®, BMTCN®; or Dawn Neuhauser, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, OCN®?

Why should you vote if you don’t know the candidates? You should have a say in who will shape the policies that will affect your credential over the next few years.

A brief biography of each candidate’s leadership experience is on page 2 of this newsletter. More information, including each candidate’s statement on how she would further the mission of ONCC can be found on the online ballot and at https://www.oncc.org/2017-election-candidates.

An email with a link to the ballot was sent November 9-10 to nurses who were certified as of October 5, 2017. If you haven’t voted yet, do it now. Check your email for a message from the ONCC Election Coordinator. All voting must be completed online by December 20.

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Vote for the Next Certification Board Member continued

Kathy Kearney
BSN, RN, OCN®, MBA
RN Manager
Oncology and Adult Infusion
The Permanente Medical Group (Kaiser)
Roseville, CA

Anna Vioral
PhD, MEd, RN, OCN®, BMTCN®
Director of Oncology Education and Research
Allegheny Health Network
Pittsburgh, PA

Dawn Neuhauser
MSN, RN, NEA-BC, OCN®
Clinical Nurse Manager – Women’s Center
City of Hope
Duarte, CA

Leadership Experience
• Greater Sacramento Chapter of ONS, 2014–Present, Secretary
• Santa Clara Valley Chapter of ONS, 2006 – 2014, member, President, Director at Large, Secretary
• ONS Foundation, PRISM (Priority Symptom Management) Development, 2001
• Leadership Morgan Hill, 2010 – 2014, Board of Directors, Committee Chair of Annual Fundraiser
• Rotacare Bay Area Clinics, 2006 – 2014, Advisory Board Member, Quality Assurance RN
• American Cancer Society Relay for Life, 2000 – 2003

Leadership Experience
• Oncology Nursing Society, 2016, Leadership Development Web Course Mentor; 2012, Educator Portal Content Specialist; 2009 – 2010, Associate Website Editor
• Greater Pittsburgh Chapter of ONS, 2002 – 2016, member, Director at Large, Newsletter Editor, Government Relations
• Northeastern Pennsylvania Chapter of ONS, 2016, member
• American Society of Clinical Oncology, 2016, Quality Certification Program Surveyor; 2013 – 2016, Quality Certification Program Oversight Council
• Allegheny Health Network, Chemo Council Chairperson; Clinical Operational Lead, Electronic Medical Record
• Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, 2001 – Present, Patient Services Subcommittee; Speakers Bureau

Leadership Experience
• Carolina Blue Ridge Chapter of ONS, 1994 – 2016, member, President, Secretary/Treasurer, Board Member, Program Chair, Annual Retreat Committee Member, Newsletter Committee
• Greater Los Angeles Chapter of ONS; Inland Empire Chapter of ONS, 2016 – present, member
• Mission Health System, Policy and Procedure Committee, 1994-2015; Co-Chair 1998
• Mission Health System, Chair – Nursing Order Build for Computerized Physician Order Entry/Electronic Health Record, 2005-2006
• Susan G Komen BMW Drive for the Cure, 2009 – 2012, Community Liaison
• North Carolina Great 100 Nurse Award, 2006

Look for the link to your online election ballot in an email sent from the ONCC election coordinator.
All voting must done online by December 20, 2017.
New Test Eligibility Criteria Takes Effect in 2019

ONCC is increasing the Registered Nurse (RN) experience and specialty practice hours a nurse needs to be eligible for one of its basic certification tests beginning in 2019.

The new eligibility will affect Oncology Certified Nurse (OCN®), Certified Pediatric Hematology Oncology Nurse (CPHON®), Certified Breast Care Nurse (CBCN®), and Blood and Marrow Transplant Certified Nurse (BMTCN®) initial test candidates. The 2019 eligibility criteria include:

- A current, active, unencumbered RN license in the US, its territories or Canada
- A minimum of two years (24 months) practice as an RN within the four years (48 months) prior to application
- A minimum of 2,000 hours of specialty nursing practice within the four years (48 months) prior to application. Specialty nursing practice includes: OCN® - adult oncology nursing practice; CPHON® - pediatric hematology/oncology nursing practice; CBCN® - breast care nursing practice; BMTCN® - BMT nursing practice.
- A minimum of 10 contact hours of credential-specific continuing nursing education or an academic elective completed within the three years (36 months) prior to application. (See specific eligibility criteria.)

ONCC President Rebecca O’Shea, APRN, OCN®, AOCNS®, CBCN® said, “The ONCC Board of Directors strongly supports the acquisition of skill and understanding through education and experience. Most undergraduate nursing programs do not provide in-depth specialty content or practice experience. Therefore, work experience is crucial in the attainment of current knowledge and skill in a specialty area.” O’Shea also noted the best theoretical context for how nurses acquire skills and understanding over time is presented in the well-known Novice to Expert Model1 by Patricia Benner, PhD, RN, FAAN. In this model, competence is the third stage in the development and acquisition of skill, and occurs at two to three years of practice.

The new eligibility criteria will not affect nurses who are renewing certification.


How Certification Changed My Career continued

best practice increased significantly, and I knew even if I didn’t pass that test the first time (which I DID, thank goodness!) my bedside confidence boost was worth all the studying. After I earned my certification, I had a different approach to nursing in general. The expectations I had of myself and my fellow oncology nurses changed. The best was never good enough. I wanted to know what was new, what was changing, how we could better protect our vulnerable patient population. My non-oncology leadership didn’t understand why our population was different. I found myself desperately trying to defend best practice oncology care to managers who cared more about limiting overtime, shortening call light response time, and improving customer service scores. They didn’t understand that sometimes we needed to spend extra time with a family who had just heard the dreaded C-word for the first time, or others who were just told they were out of options. It wasn’t always possible to finish documentation on time when you were caring for a beloved patient who was imminently dying. I realized that to make a bigger impact I needed to transition to a job where I could directly change the quality and policy of oncology practice.

Managing the QOPI® Certification Program at ASCO for the last year and a half has brought an even newer respect for OCN® certification. We certify small one-physician practices all the way up to the largest oncology research centers in the country. The majority of practices that apply for QOPI® Certification are nurse-driven, and it makes me proud to know that the demand for excellence starts with us. It still gives me goosebumps when I hear practices describe their desire for quality improvement, and it is so satisfying to assist them in improving the care they provide to their patients every day. There are days when I miss bedside nursing, but I am thankful for the experiences that have brought me to my current position. I am humbled to join the ONCC Certification News Editorial Board, and hope that my experiences can assist those working at the bedside and chairside provide the kind of quality oncology nursing they want to give to their patients.

March 19 is Certified Nurses Day.

Request free promotional materials today!
www.oncc.org/Promote/MaterialsRequestForm
Memorial Sloan Kettering Boasts Two Certification Award Winners: OCN® and CBCN® of the Year

Erica Fischer-Cartlidge, DNP, CNS, CBCN®, AOCNS®

It is my pleasure to introduce Mikel Ross, BSN, RN, OCN®, CBCN® as the 2017 Certified Breast Care Nurse (CBCN®) of the Year alongside his colleague Annette Roman, MSN, RN, OCN®, the 2017 Oncology Certified Nurse (OCN®) of the Year!

Roman and Ross have been colleagues since 2013 when Ross joined the Evelyn H. Lauder Breast Center at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center (MSK) and Roman was the nursing professional development specialist assigned to his onboarding. Since then they have collaborated on a regular basis and Roman was even one of the nominators for Ross! When asked what it meant to not only receive this honor but to do so together, Roman said, “It was amazing!” Ross acknowledged that it was a true testament to the fact that no one can really be successful without others. He shared how getting recognized alongside Roman reaffirmed for him that he works at the right place with the right people.

Both went on to acknowledge the role that MSK has had in their success. They cited the organizational support and time provided for volunteering for ONCC task forces and leadership roles, the inclusion of certification as a requirement for progression up the clinical ladder, and the high percentage of certified nurses in the organization to look up to as role models as some of the contributing factors.

Roman earned her OCN® certification in 2004 when she was working as an infusion nurse. Now as a Nursing Professional Development Specialist at MSK, Roman works with outpatient nurses across the organization to not only provide education and mentorship for their professional development pursuits but she goes above and beyond to promote certification. This has included the development of an OCN® prep course at one of the organization’s satellites, which evolved into a multiple module online course that brought certification preparation to all sites. To make this vision a reality Roman had to lead a large group of content experts in developing the curriculum and creating the interactive course platform. Outside of MSK, she has worked with her local ONS chapter to lead a large group of content experts in developing the curriculum and creating the interactive course platform. Outside of MSK, she has worked with her local ONS chapter to lead a large group of content experts in developing the curriculum and creating the interactive course platform.

Roman shared an experience she had shortly after becoming certified. She recognized a chemotherapy dosage was wrong—she had recently studied the content—and had the confidence to alert the physician to the error. She shared that she always remembered what it meant for her to pass her certification test and believes that is what drives her to promote certification and help others attain it. She shared, “Honestly, I don’t think about it – I just find myself talking about certification all the time. It’s just the way I am.”

Ross has also worked with oncology patients for more than 20 years in various settings and with different types of cancer patients, including those on clinical trials. He shared that he made the decision to pursue CBCN® after already having his OCN®, because he had to prove to himself that he truly had the level of knowledge he thought he did. He shared his belief that we owe it to ourselves as nurses to confirm our expertise and obtain certification for many reasons. In his current role Ross champions certification by serving as a role model to his peers, mentoring junior staff, and through his professional activities outside of his daily job. In 2016 Ross participated with nurses from across the country on the CBCN® Role Delineation Study Task Force for ONCC. Twice per year he is an instructor in a comprehensive two-day breast course offered by MSK that is geared toward preparing nurses for the CBCN® exam.

Both Ross and Roman shared that they believe certification is putting yourself out there to “test if you know what you think you know.” They shared that it requires asking oneself if you have met a standard of knowledge and practice at a certain level of expertise. It is clear these two have surpassed the bar. With the growing complexity of care and demands of patients in oncology, we are certainly lucky to have Annette Roman and Mikel Ross leading nurses to higher pursuits of excellence.
Describing the contributions of Rebecca Sipples, DNP, APRN, CRNP, AAHPN, AOCNP® is daunting. As her colleague Dr. Mary Kate Eanniello, DNP, RN, OCN®, of Hartford Healthcare Cancer Institute, stated “I don’t know where she finds the energy to do so many things so well.” This sentiment is reflected in Rebecca’s recommendation letters for this award.

Sipples has consistently supported oncology certification since obtaining her own AOCNP® credential in 2006, while an NP at Yale Cancer Center. As a preceptor, she would encourage nurses to become OCN® certified and as a professor at University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), Rebecca designed course work for graduate students so they would be successful in obtaining oncology certification after graduation. Her diligence is reflected by a near 100% of her students passing their certification tests. Sipples didn’t stop there and went on to design a sub-specialty for graduate students at UAB in oncology as well.

Beyond education, Sipples is involved in the Central Connecticut ONS Chapter and has held various board positions over the years. According to Dr. Eanniello, this award-winning nurse is a “diligent and energizing leader” who continuously supports educational opportunities for chapter members, especially for recertification. Despite all of this, her commitment to oncology nursing doesn’t stop close to home. She has extended oncology and palliative care education to nurses in Sub-Saharan Africa and Hong Kong by both teaching there and with curriculum design.

Sipple’s supervisor Marie Bakitas DNSc, CRNP, AOCN®, ACHPN, FAAN says, “I have never met another oncology nurse who better exemplifies the qualities of this award.” In all aspects of her career, Sipples has lead the way by encouraging oncology certification in her students and her APN peers. Rebecca exemplifies how we all can model-the-way for others to obtain their certification and promote the oncology nursing profession.

Congratulations, Rebecca Sipples!

One of the reasons Kristin Donahue, RN, MSN, OCN® and director of educational services at Clearview Cancer Institute says she loves working for Clearview is because of the level of importance her physicians place on education. “We are a physician-owned practice and they are very supportive of the nursing staff. They want nurses to have as much education as they possibly can and designed a program that gives not only financial support but the time to complete it, too.”

Donahue said she wasn’t surprised that Clearview Cancer Institute, located in Huntsville, Alabama, won the Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation (ONCC) 2017 Employer Recognition Award. “We know how unique our program is, and winning it was a good reminder to our leadership that we are doing the right thing.”

One of the unique benefits provided to nurses at Clearview Cancer Institute is three paid education days every year for continuing education activities. Staff can use those days to take certification preparation courses or complete other educational activities required to maintain their license or certification. “It shows how dedicated our physicians are to continuing education and we know we are very fortunate to have that level of support,” said Donahue.

In addition to paid educational days, nurses are eligible to apply for full scholar-
Dyane Bunnell Honored as Certified Pediatric Oncology Nurse of Year

Lisa Bjorkelo, MSN, RN, CPON®, BMTCN®, CNE, CPN

Dyane Bunnell, 2017 CPON® of the Year

Dyane Bunnell, MSN, APRN-BC, AOCNS®, CPON®, a Clinical Nurse Specialist in Hematology/Oncology at the Nemours/Alfred I. duPont Hospital for Children has been selected as the 2017 CPON® of the Year. Bunnell has cared for children and young adults with cancer and blood disorders for over three decades. After earning her BSN from the University of Delaware in 1982, she started her career at The Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, where she was a direct patient care nurse for over 20 years in the oncology/bone marrow transplant unit. Bunnell received her MSN from the University of Delaware and for the past fourteen years she has been a Clinical Nurse Specialist at Nemours/A. I. duPont in Wilmington, DE. Bunnell was nominated for the CPHON® of the year award by hematology/oncology unit nurse manager Mary Newman BSN, RN, NE-BC, CPON®, Bone Marrow Transplant Coordinator Lauren Micale BSN, RN, CPHON®, and Director of Nursing Excellence Norine Watson MSN, RN, NEA-BC.

At Nemours/A. I. duPont, Bunnell developed and implemented a certification review course that is offered free of charge to nurses. The course is offered on an as-needed basis and has been presented nearly twenty times over the last eleven years. She offers classes in test-taking strategies and serves as a personal coach and mentor for nurses seeking certification. She also helps nurses through the renewal process by identifying appropriate continuing education activities. Bunnell is proud to say that she has helped over 50 nurses achieve CPON® or CPHON® certification. Currently, 83% of the outpatient infusion nurses and 64% of the inpatient hematology/oncology and bone marrow transplant nurses are certified. However, for Bunnell, it is not these numbers which drive her, rather the understanding that certified nurses improve patient outcomes. Once certified, Bunnell works with other nursing leaders to ensure that certified nurses are recognized and celebrated in the organization. Bunnell’s commitment to excellence in pediatric hematology/oncology patient care and RN development is evident, particularly through her involvement in the Association of Hematology Oncology Nurses (APHON). She is very active in APHON and supports its mission by volunteering her time and expertise at both the local and national level. On the local level, she is a Past President and current Director of Education for the First State APHON chapter. She is a key member of the planning committee for the very successful scholarships for review courses, or may submit for a 50 percent course fee reimbursement if they are not selected for a scholarship. Once a nurse successfully passes a certification exam they are eligible for a $1,000 certification incentive payment. The Institute also reimburses staff for re-certification fees.

Certification is also tied to other areas of recognition at Clearview Cancer Institute. For employees to move up in the clinical ladder program they must achieve certification. Each year during Nurses’ Week all certified nurses are also specially recognized. Finally, staff must be certified to be considered for the Clearview Cancer Institute Nurse of the Year Award.

Since winning the 2017 ONCC Employer Recognition Award earlier this year, Donahue says she’s seen an increase in staff interest in the certification reimbursement program. “There is definitely a renewed sense of excitement from the newer staff. We have a few preparing now and more applying.”

Donahue said that the excitement didn’t stop with the nursing staff. “We posted our win on our Facebook page, and our patients were so proud of us. They recognize that we go above and beyond for our patients.”

It’s clear to see why this organization was selected this year for the 2017 Employer Recognition Award! Congratulations, Clearview Cancer Institute
The ONCC FreeTake Program is accepting applications from institutions that would like to participate in the program in 2018. ONCC FreeTake is an institutional program that enables nurses from participating organizations to apply for a certification test for free. If they don’t pass the test on the first attempt, they get a free retest. The institution is only charged the test fee when the nurse passes the test. To participate, organizations must agree to provide a minimum of 10 test candidates during a 12-month period. The institution may define the 12-month period.

The program began in 2017 when nearly 200 institutions signed on to participate, and generated more than 3,300 certification test applicants.

Program information is available at www.oncc.org/oncc-freetake-program. Institutions that are interested in participating should review the program information, download the 2018 letter of agreement for internal review and approval, and submit the completed agreement to ONCC.

Dyane Bunnell continued

Of winning the award Bunnell states: “The CPON® of the Year award stands for all that I am passionate about in my professional career: enhancing the education of nurses, promoting nursing certification, and ensuring that pediatric oncology nurses have the skills and knowledge they need to deliver high quality nursing care to children with cancer and blood disorders. It is truly an honor to receive this award and I am especially humbled to have been nominated by my peers, who share my passion for this nursing specialty.”

Congratulations to Dyane Bunnell on this most-deserved award.

Wishing you
Happy Holidays from ONCC!