



# Mixing Strategy and Passion for Review Course Success

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Certification during your nursing career is a vital first step to fulfilling a lifetime of professional growth and development in oncology nursing. Nurses seek certification for many reasons: to achieve goals, meet employer expectations, or pursue lifelong learning. The big question many nurses face is “Where do I begin?” Nurses who may not have taken a test in a long period of time face challenges of how to prepare for a certification test and frequently look to their nursing administrators or advanced practice nurses to support their test preparation efforts. From study groups to Web courses, preparing for a certification test is an individual preference and not all study modalities meet one’s personal learning style.

Nurses who currently are certified are in a unique position to act as coaches, mentors, and teachers for other nurses who want guidance in preparing for certification. Although sharing test content and questions is prohibited, certified nurses can take an active part in supporting their peers by sharing what mechanisms worked for them during test preparation or serving as developers and educators for an oncology certification review course within their institution or local ONS chapter.

The most important part of developing a course or study group is following the most recent edition of the test blueprint found in the ONCC Test Bulletin. The blueprint outlines the focus areas of study that will be included on the certification test. It serves as a foundation for developing the core outline of your course content. For example, symptom management (22%) currently is the largest component on the OCN® test blueprint (ONCC, 2013); therefore, when planning your review course, you should strategize to allow adequate time for covering this topic.

Try to be creative in the delivery of your program, and, if time permits, keep the learning fun and interactive. Ask review questions, play games, and spark competitiveness by placing groups of nurses on teams and awarding prizes for those who answer the most questions correctly. Adult learners like to have fun and be part of the learning process.

Include study tips and tools for participants. Encourage them to refer back to these suggestions as they continue along their track toward certification. ONCC has a bookmark available that highlights test-taking tips. You should state that your course does not guarantee successful completion of the examination but is intended to serve as a supplement to the nurse’s independent preparation time. ONCC has numerous resources on its Web site, such as free review questions (<https://practicetests.oncc.org/>) and a video that features oncology certified nurses speaking about the value of certification. Such materials can further motivate nurses to stick to their study path toward certification.

Another essential part of course development is timing and course content development. How long do you have to teach the course? Will it have one instructor or many? Will the course be held on- or offsite? How will you develop the course? How can you incorporate PowerPoint slides, case studies, and independent study into the course content? How can the course be interactive and involve participants in the learning? For many staff nurses, an on-site course at their institution may be beneficial because it may support their work-life balance. Another idea may be carving out time to utilize simulation techniques as a creative and memorable approach to learning the aspects of oncologic emergencies or end-of-life care. When forming your team of educators, think outside the box and get innovative! Finding nurses who want to teach this type of course and are motivated and knowledgeable in key content areas, promote certification, and value its significance will contribute to the success of course planning and implementation.

Pace your content based upon the audience. If offering a course to a select nursing department, perhaps a weekly overview would work better than an eight-hour class. Collaborate with nurse managers and administrators to discuss options that would meet mutual goals and align with nurses' work schedules. The possibilities are endless, and attention to detail during the planning phase of the course will lead to positive outcomes.

Marketing is also a major component of course planning and development. Who is your target audience? Will it be nurses from your own institution, or do you intend to offer the course to your local region, such as your ONS chapter members? How may social media work for you? If you are just starting out, staying within the walls of your own institution may be beneficial. This approach allows you time to learn how to implement a course and reflect on the evaluations from your own nursing staff. You can consider the lessons learned, find areas for improvement, and view the entire educational process for the positives and negatives. Remember, feedback from your audience affords you the opportunity to improve your teaching and coordination skills. This level of feedback ultimately will enhance your next program offering.

Networking with other oncology nurses who already have presented engaging review courses may help you get your course off to a good start. They may share success stories or strategies that have not worked for them. They may refer possible speakers or offer samples of their brochures or templates of their course outlines. Most often, the networking process offers time for questions and answers and serves as a support system to let you know that you are not alone in your quest to guide other nurses in the process of obtaining oncology nursing certification. A list of course contacts is available at <http://www.oncc.org/TakeTest/ReviewCourses>. Additionally, ONS's Educator Resource Center is available to help enhance the development of your curriculum and is home to cancer nursing slide sets, case studies, and fast fact sheets for a subscription fee (<https://erc.ons.org>).

Finally, being passionate and dedicated to supporting nurses along the certification journey is one of the most rewarding facets of coordinating a review course. This passion, combined with time, energy, and knowledge, will lead you to success and a feeling of pride that you were able to make a positive difference to oncology nurses.

#### Reference

Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation. (2013). 2013 oncology nursing certification test bulletin. Retrieved from [http://www.oncc.org/media/oncc/docs/testbulletin\\_2013.pdf](http://www.oncc.org/media/oncc/docs/testbulletin_2013.pdf)

*Please note:* ONCC does not guarantee success with the use of these tips. The tips are meant to provide suggestions that can be modified to best fit an institution.