ONCC Announces New Eligibility Criteria for Initial Certification in 2019

PITTSBURGH, PA – November 27, 2017 – The Oncology Nursing Certification Corporation (ONCC) is implementing new eligibility criteria for its basic certification examinations, beginning in 2019. The updated eligibility criteria require nurses to have more experience as a Registered Nurse (RN) and more hours of specialty practice before they can take a certification test.

The new eligibility will commence in 2019 affecting 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:

1. A current, active, unencumbered RN license
2. A minimum of two years (24 months) of practice as an RN within the four years (48 months) prior to application
3. 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.
4. 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.

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.

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O’Shea explained that an ONCC Task Force, representing a broad range of stakeholders, was established to review current eligibility criteria and make recommendations based on sound rationale. They found that Patricia Benner’s Novice to Expert Model continues to provide the best theoretical context for how nurses acquire skills and understanding over time. In this model, competence is the third stage in the development and acquisition of skill, and occurs at two to three years of practice. O’Shea also noted the Task Force reviewed eligibility criteria for basic certifications of 12 similar organizations. Most require two years of RN experience and more than 1,000 hours of specialty practice. Based on Benner’s model and evidence from other specialty nursing certifications, the Task Force made recommendations to revise the eligibility requirements and the recommendations were adopted by the Board.

Cyndi Miller Murphy, MSN, RN, CAE, FAAN, ONCC Executive Director said that accreditation standards from the National Commission for Competency Assurance (NCCA) require credentialing organizations regularly review eligibility criteria and provide a sound rationale for those criteria. “NCCA accreditation indicates ONCC certifications meet national standards for high-quality certification programs. It’s very important that ONCC maintain this recognition of quality.”

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


ONCC is the premier provider of nationally accredited certifications for nurses in oncology and related specialties. More than 38,000 nurses are currently certified by ONCC. More information about certification can be found at www.oncc.org.

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