



## ***National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses***

### ***Position Statement Orthopaedic Certification for Nurses***

The Orthopaedic Nurses Certification Board (ONCB) was founded by the National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses (NAON) in 1986 in response to a request from the membership for a certification program to further establish orthopaedic nursing as a specialty and to recognize expertise in the field. ONCB continues to uphold these goals by defining minimum performance standards and developing a mechanism to distinguish those nurses who meet the standards. ONCB maintains a fair, valid, and reliable certification program. In addition, ONCB certification is based on empirical research (i.e., role delineation studies) that is conducted on a regular basis and links the content of the certification examination (test blueprint) directly to practice.

“Almost every household in America is affected in some way by diseases of bones, joints, muscles, and skin” (National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases [NIAMS], 2004). Rapid scientific and technological advances in musculoskeletal care require nurses to know more and do more than ever before. In addition, the United States is facing a nursing shortage “that is expected to intensify as baby boomers age and the need for health care grows” (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2004). This, coupled with the prevalence of musculoskeletal disease, means that fewer nurses are caring for more patients with these disorders. The competence of these nurses is of paramount importance. ONC certification provides validation of the specialized knowledge and experience required for competent performance.

#### **It Is the Position of NAON That**

- Orthopaedic nursing certification provided by ONCB is sound and beneficial to patients and society at large. NAON encourages orthopaedic nurses in varied work settings to become certified.
- The ONCB certification program is rigorous and the certification is a sound, legally defensible measure of orthopaedic nursing knowledge.
- Regardless of the health care setting, orthopaedic nursing certification benefits patients and their families, nurses, and employers. Orthopaedic nursing certification validates nurses’ attainment of stringent requirements for knowledge and experience and indicates they are qualified to provide competent orthopaedic care. All nurses who provide care to patients with musculoskeletal diseases should seek to become certified by ONCB.

- Employers who support orthopaedic nursing certification demonstrate their commitment to providing the highest quality of care to patients with musculoskeletal disorders throughout the health/illness continuum. Employers should hire orthopaedic-certified nurses, support employed nurses in attaining and maintaining certification, reward those nurses who become certified, and inform patients and the public about the certification status of their nursing staff.
- Health care consumers have a right to know the qualifications of those responsible for their care. Orthopaedic-certified nurses should inform patients of their certification and explain the meaning of the certification. Certified nurses should be allowed and encouraged by their employers to display their credentials on their name badges.

## **Background**

The American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) (2003) defined nursing certification as “the formal recognition of the specialized knowledge, skills, and experience demonstrated by the achievement of standards identified by a nursing specialty to promote optimal patient care.” Orthopaedic nursing certification provides tangible evidence that nurses have the knowledge required to effectively provide care to patients experiencing the complex problems associated with a musculoskeletal diagnosis at any stage of life. One orthopaedic nursing credential is currently offered by ONCB, and an advanced practice credential is in development. The ONC credential indicates that a nurse has attained basic orthopaedic certification. The advanced credential will indicate that a nurse has attained orthopaedic certification at the advanced level as a clinical nurse specialist or nurse practitioner. As of June 30, 2004, approximately 2,700 nurses hold orthopaedic nursing credential awarded by ONCB.

*The NAON Executive Board acknowledges the contributions and expertise of the ONCB, who assisted in the development of this position.*

## **References**

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