

Increasing PACU Certification and Recognition During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Background

Healthcare organizations' high certification rates can represent skilled and experienced registered nurses' commitment to nursing professionalism and excellence of healthcare delivery. Research has shown that higher nursing specialty certification rates are associated with better patient outcomes and a higher sense of nursing empowerment. Progress in improving the number of nurses with specialized certification is one of the essentials for a healthcare organization to obtain Magnet Recognition.

Although NYU Langone Orthopedic Hospital (NYULOH) is a Magnet-designated institution, there is an overall goal of 51% nursing certification for re-designation. In 2018, the PACU nursing certification rate was 43%, which was below the Magnet benchmark. Of the 30 eligible nurses, 13 nurses were certified. The PACU implemented strategies to increase certification rates, but the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic discouraged nurses from becoming certified.

Some limitations to obtaining certification are:

- Examination cost & inadequate compensation
- Expenses to maintain the credential
- Lack of study time & test-taking discomfort
- Knowledge deficit on certification information & resources
- Stressors and restrictions related to COVID-19 pandemic
- Weak interest in certification (Perlstein et al., 2014)

Purpose

To increase the certification rate in the PACU and achieve a goal of 60% by March 2022, PACU has outlined effective strategies to engage nurses to become certified and maintain certification.

Method

The principles of Appreciative Inquiry was applied in our action plan to engage nurses in obtaining professional certification. Our strategy focuses on what is already positive in the current practice, creating a clear vision for the future, identifying positive actions to reach the dream based on positive past achievements, and creating a climate for positive empowerment (Cooperrider, 2012).

In 2018, a survey was distributed to PACU nurses addressing the barriers and motivators for achieving certification. Based on the results, certified nurses, weLearn Champions, nursing leadership, and nurse educators used a team approach and implemented strategies to increase certification rates. Due to the restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, strategies were modified to comply with social distancing guidelines with limited participants for in-person activities. Nurses embraced technology by distributing certification information via emails, video conferencing with educational presentations, and using electronic learning platforms. In addition to pinning ceremonies and nursing celebrations, certified nurses were recognized on the hospital website, newsletters, emails, and a photo wall displayed in the PACU.



Outcomes

Nurses report increased knowledge of the certification process and feeling supported to become certified. Changes in nurses' eligibility and nursing turnover affects the certification rates. As of October 2021, PACU certification rate is 61.3%, which is above the benchmark and the unit goal.

- Of the 31 eligible nurses, 19 are certified.
 - 10 nurses hold one certification.
 - 5 nurses have two certifications.
 - 3 nurses have three certifications.
 - 1 nurse holds four certifications.
- Most common certifications are CPAN/CAPA, ONC, and CCRN.

Conclusion

Notwithstanding the challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic, the PACU certification rate increased by 18.3% due to the implementation of informational, celebratory, and supportive strategies. Achieving certification also inspires nurses to pursue professional development opportunities, including the clinical ladder. Although these combined efforts helped NYULOH PACU to exceed and maintain the Magnet goal for the past three years, the unit must also address the challenges of nursing turnover and modify strategies in an evolving healthcare environment for the continued success of high certification rates in the future.

References

- David Cooperrider and Associates. (2012). *What is appreciative inquiry?* Retrieved from davidcooperrider.com/ai-process.
- Perlstein, L., Hoffmann, R. L., Lindberg, J., & Petras, D. (2014). Addressing barriers to achieving nursing certification. *Journal for Nurses in Professional Development*, 30(6), 309–315.

Informational & Celebratory Strategies

- Certification Coaches & Study Groups
- Unit-based Education (weLearn)
- Conferences & Educational Events
- Magnet Grand Rounds
- Video-conferencing (WebEx)
- Review Book & Course Raffles
- Resource "Exhibition" Tables
- Certification Information Sharing via Emails
- Trivia Games (Kahoot!)
- Nursing Celebrations
- Testimonials
- "PACU Certified Nurse" Pinning Ceremony
- Staff Meetings & Huddles
- "Flashback Fridays" Email Announcements
- PACU Community Webpage (NYU Intranet)
- PeriOpScope Newsletter
- NYULOH Nursing Newsletter
- "PACU Certified Nurses: Wall of Distinction" Board

Supportive Organizational Culture for NYULOH PACU Certified Nurses

