

Right Cert, Right Specialty: How Policy Sparked a Perianesthesia Certification Surge

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Abstract Background Information: The perianesthesia unit experienced a decline in CPAN/CAPA specialty certification rates, dropping to 51.8%. A significant number of nurses holding Clinical Nurse 3 (CN3) status maintained certification in areas not aligned with their current clinical practice, such as medical-surgical (CMSRN) or progressive care (PCCN) nursing. At the time, the clinical ladder policy allowed any nursing certification to satisfy CN3 requirements, regardless of specialty relevance, inadvertently disincentivizing certification in perianesthesia nursing.

Objectives of Project: To support CN3 nurses in maintaining their clinical ladder status while aligning certification with their current specialty, and to increase the departmental CPAN/CAPA certification rate to 75% or higher.

Process of Implementation: In collaboration with the organization’s Shared Leadership Council (SLC), hospital leadership, clinical educators, and frontline staff reached a consensus to revise the clinical ladder policy. The updated policy now requires that CN3 nurses hold specialty certification in the area of their current clinical practice to maintain CN3 status. Per policy guidelines, CN3 nurses have one year from the date of eligibility to obtain the appropriate certification.

To support this transition, PACU leadership met individually with all CN3 nurses who did not hold CPAN, CAPA, or CCRN certification to communicate the policy change and provide individualized deadlines for compliance. In addition, PACU educators offered Perianesthesia Certification Review classes and shared study resources via Microsoft Teams to facilitate preparation and promote certification success.

Statement of Successful Practice: The department’s CPAN/CAPA certification rate increased significantly from 51.8% in Fall 2023 to 80.2% by Spring 2025. This improvement reflects the effectiveness of the policy change and the targeted support strategies. Of the CN3 nurses impacted, only two did not maintain their CN3 status—one of whom chose not to pursue certification.

Implications for Advancing the Practice of Perianesthesia Nursing: CPAN/CAPA certification serves as a nationally recognized validation of a perianesthesia nurse’s specialized knowledge and clinical expertise. Achieving certification not only enhances professional credibility but also fosters confidence among employers, colleagues, and patients. Integrating specialty-specific certification requirements into clinical ladder

policies can serve as a powerful incentive, promoting certification pursuit and ultimately advancing the quality and professionalism of perianesthesia nursing practice.