

# WOUND OSTOMY AND CONTINENCE NURSING CERTIFICATION: THE VALUE AND THE PROCESS



## Kathy Wright, RN, MS, CWOCN, CHRN, APRN Immediate Past President of the Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nursing Certification Board and Northeast Regional Director of Clinical Services, National Healing Corporation

The American Board of Nursing Specialties defines certification as “the formal recognition of specialized knowledge, skills and experience demonstrated by the achievement of standards identified by a nursing specialty to promote optimal health”.

The concept of certification began over 50 years ago as a way to recognize and differentiate the value of expert nurses from those at an entry level. The Wound Ostomy Continence Nursing Certification Board (WOCNCB) administers a credentialing program for nurses specializing in any one or all three of these nursing fields, along with credentialing for nurses specializing in foot and nail care.

Credentialing programs serve the purpose of:

- ❖ Protecting the public.
- ❖ Establishing standards for professional knowledge, skills and practice.
- ❖ Assuring consumers and employers that professionals have met standards of practice.
- ❖ Meeting the requirements of governmental regulation.
- ❖ Advancing the profession and the specialty area.
- ❖ Reflecting an individual’s attainment of knowledge and skill in the specialty.
- ❖ Providing the individual certificant with a sense of professional accomplishment, credibility, and opportunities for career advancement.
- ❖ Demonstrating an individual’s commitment to the specialty profession and to life-long learning!

The literature cites certification as a key contributor to quality assurance and the reduction in healthcare errors. It is noted that other healthcare providers actively seek consultation with a Board Certified Wound Ostomy Continence Nurse (CWOCN) when managing complicated wounds or ostomies, particularly when traditional interventions are unsuccessful. When guided by CWOCNs, the appropriate and consistent use of advanced wound care products and protocols led to reduced healing times and fewer complications when compared to published standards. Using telemedicine, CWOCN enabled patients and home caregivers to achieve significantly decreased wound healing times while also reducing the number of required home care visits. The positive financial impact of having a CWOCN involved in complex patient management is of significant value!

## EXAM DEVELOPMENT:

**Step 1:** A content expert panel is created, composed of practitioners based on their education, experience and comprehensive knowledge of the specialty. The panel develops a role delineation or job analysis survey to identify the performance domains (tasks, knowledge and/or skills) related to the specialty credential.

**Step 2:** The Job Analysis Survey is distributed to a diverse population of specialty practitioners to gather input on the most current practice patterns.

**Step 3:** The results of the Job Analysis Survey are analyzed to create a test content outline.

**Step 4:** The Exam Committee, a group of practicing specialty nurses, write certification exam questions based on topics identified in the test content outline. Each item is carefully reviewed for validity and quality by the entire committee, with guidance of the contracted testing company, before being utilized on the exam. Sources in the literature are cited for each question.

**Step 5:** The Exam Committee in collaboration with the testing company assembles the exams, assuring equivalent content and level of difficulty for each exam form.

**Step 6:** Overall testing scores along with each question’s performance are statistically analyzed. Passing standards (“cut scores”) are determined consistent with the purpose of the credential and the established standards of competence for the profession.

**Step 7:** The Job Analysis Survey is repeated at regular intervals and the test content outlined revised as needed to assure that the certification examination captures current specialty practice.

The WOCNCB works closely with a psychometrician and the testing company team to maintain exam administration policies and procedures for standardization, security, and confidentiality. The certification program is accredited by two independent, external accrediting agencies, the American Board of Nursing Specialties and the National Commission of Certifying Agencies, ensuring administration of a **psychometrically sound and legally defensible credentialing program!**



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