



POSITION STATEMENT

ENTRY LEVEL WOUND, OSTOMY AND CONTINENCE NURSE EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION

INTRODUCTION

Wound, Ostomy and Continence (WOC) nursing is a distinct and well-defined field of nursing practice that is international in scope and based on a tested body of specialty-related, evidenced-based knowledge. WOC nursing specialty practice is consistent with the American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) definition of a nursing specialty, in that there is an identified need for the WOC nursing specialty and these nursing professionals devote most of their practice to their area of nursing expertise.

A WOC nurse provides acute and rehabilitative care for people with selected disorders of the gastrointestinal, genitourinary, and integumentary systems. The WOC nurse provides direct care to people with abdominal stomas, wounds, fistulas, drains, pressure ulcers and continence disorders, and participates in assessment, planning, implementation, and evaluation of patients with wound, ostomy, and continence care needs. As an educator, consultant, researcher, and administrator, the WOC nurse plays a pivotal role in the guidance of optimal patient care in multiple healthcare settings, including inpatient, outpatient, long-term care, and home health.

WOUND OSTOMY AND CONTINENCE NURSING CERTIFICATION BOARD: CREDENTIALING

The Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nursing Certification Board (WOCNCB®) is a professional organization dedicated to promoting the highest standard of consumer care and safety by providing credentialing in the areas of wound, ostomy, and continence nursing. The purposes of a credentialing program are to protect the public by establishing standards for professional practice and to assess individual nurses' knowledge and skills related to practice. This assures consumers that the certified professionals have met standards of practice. The National Organization for Competency Assurance (NOCA) Guide to Understanding Credentialing Concepts states, "End-of-course examinations should not be allowed to substitute for professional credentialing examinations, because these examinations are not designed for, and are therefore not valid for, these purposes" (National Organization for Competency Assurance, 2005, p. 8). The WOCNCB® is the only body providing certification for wound, ostomy, or continence care nurses that is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) and the American Board of Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC). ABSNC and NCCA both adhere to a stringent and comprehensive accreditation process based on accepted standards of testing. WOCNCB® provided extensive documentation demonstrating that it met the 18 ABSNC standards of quality and the 22 NCCA accreditation standards. By meeting these high standards for accreditation, WOCNCB® demonstrates a commitment to the development and administration of a legally defensible and psychometrically sound certification program. The Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nursing Certification Board (WOCNCB®) has certified over 10,000 nurses since 1978 in the areas of wound, ostomy, continence, and foot care nursing.

The WOCNCB® certification is voluntary; nurses who hold WOCNCB® credentials have demonstrated their commitment to and knowledge of WOC nursing practice by meeting stringent, predetermined standards, and passing a rigorous comprehensive wound, ostomy, or continence examination(s). WOCNCB® credentialing provides formal recognition of this commitment to high standards in wound, ostomy, and continence nursing. Certification provides formal recognition of knowledge as a wound, ostomy, or continence care nurse beyond that gained from traditional nursing education programs.



The WOCNCB® stands firmly in its belief that WOC certification improves the level and quality of patient care by defining and maintaining competency within the WOC specialties. Furthermore, certification provides a competitive advantage for employment and promotes job satisfaction. The nurse who chooses to certify demonstrates a commitment to WOC nursing practice and patient protection. Credentials are awarded for a five-year period. Recertification can be achieved by means of an examination or a portfolio process through the Professional Growth Program (PGP).

ELIGIBILITY FOR CERTIFICATION

The WOCNCB's predetermined eligibility requirements must be met before a candidate is permitted to take the initial examination. Eligibility requirements include current licensure as a registered nurse with a baccalaureate degree. Additionally, the nurse must document completion of one of the following educational options:

Graduation from a WOCN® Society accredited educational program. A tri-specialty program offering education for wound, ostomy, and continence management includes at least 240 hours of student contact, 120 hours of didactic instruction, and 120 hours of clinical patient care. A specialty course provides at least 100 hours of student contact that includes at least 40 hours of didactic instruction, 40 hours of clinical patient care, and 20 additional hours distributed according to the student's learning needs per specialty area (wound, ostomy and/or continence management).

Completion of 1,500 hours of practice in WOC nursing and 50 continuing education contact hours or graduate level course work in WOC nursing, within the last five years, for **each** specialty for which certification is being pursued (375 of the practice ~~clinical~~ hours must be within the past year). The practice hours and continuing education contact hours /course work must be directly related to the specialty for which certification is sought.

Demonstrating eligibility for certification by the WOCNCB® through documented evidence of intensive education and clinical experience, beyond what can be attained in a short course that does not include focused clinical practice, helps ensure that the nurse who attempts the examination is prepared to deliver comprehensive patient care.

CREDENTIALS

The following WOCNCB® credentials are registered trademarks and are awarded based on the successful completion of the examination(s) or the portfolio process.

CWOCN®	Certified Wound Ostomy Continence Nurse
CWCN®	Certified Wound Care Nurse
COCN®	Certified Ostomy Care Nurse
CCCN®	Certified Continence Care Nurse
CWON®	Certified Wound Ostomy Nurse
CWOCN—AP®	Certified Wound Ostomy Continence Nurse Advance Practice
CWON—AP®	Certified Wound Ostomy Nurse Advance Practice
CWCN — AP®	Certified Wound Care Nurse Advance Practice
COCN — AP®	Certified Ostomy Care Nurse Advance Practice
CCCN — AP®	Certified Continence Care Nurse Advance Practice



REFERENCES

American Board of Specialty Nursing Certification. (2022). *Accreditation Standards for Examination-Based Certification Programs*. Aurora, OH.

National Commission for Certifying Agencies. (2004). *Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs*. Washington, DC.

National Organization for Competency Assurance (2005). *The NOCA Guide to Understanding Credentialing Concepts*. Primary Author Cynthia C. Durley, Washington, DC.

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WOCNCB®. (2026). *Candidate Examination Handbook*. Milwaukee, WI.

WOCN Accreditation Policy & Procedure Manual (2007). Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurses Society, Mt. Laurel: NJ.

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WOCN Society Position Statement: Role and Scope of Practice for Wound Care Providers (April 2017). Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurses Society, Mt. Laurel: NJ.