
The National Alliance of Wound Care and Ostomy (NAWCO) is a leading national organization of wound care and ostomy professionals.

It is the only national organization that represents both wound care and ostomy professionals. NAWCO is a non-profit organization that is dedicated to the advancement of the wound care and ostomy professions.

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CWCN, CWON, or CWOCN.

The Wound Ostomy Continence Nursing Board (WOCNCB) sets the following requirements for individuals wanting to take the certification examination:²⁶

1. Have a current RN License.
2. Hold a bachelor's (or higher) degree; all baccalaureate degrees are applicable.
3. Have completed ONE of the following pathways of education or practice:
 - A. Traditional Pathway
 - Graduate from an accredited WOC Nursing Education Program.
 - The WOC (ET) Nursing Education Program must have been completed within the past five years (from date of exam application); otherwise, you must prove eligibility via the Experiential Pathway.
 - The WOC (ET) Nursing Education Program must be accredited by the WOCN® Society at the time of graduation.
 - B. Experiential Pathway
 - The accumulation of direct patient clinical hours and continuing education credits (contact hours) must be earned post-bachelor's degree while practicing as an RN.
 - 50 CE/CME credits (contact hours) or an equivalent in college course work must be completed over the five years previous to the date of application. All CE/CME credits (contact hours) or college course work must directly apply to the specialty of wound care.
 - 1,500 direct patient clinical hours must be completed within the previous five years. Furthermore, 375 hours must have occurred within the year prior to application.

Providing evidence of a level of expertise by way of a valid accredited certification board is an important way to raise standards and to ultimately improve the quality of care that patients need and deserve.

VI. Nonaccredited Wound Care Certification Programs and Certificate of Completion Courses

Wound care certification and certificate services offered by other organizations may be nonaccredited certifications or merely certificates of completion, which can be mistaken for an accredited wound care certification. Example:

- VOHRA Wound Physicians
- CMET

VII. Distinctions Between Accredited Certifications and a Certificate of Attendance

The key distinctions between an accredited certification and a certificate of attendance is defined by the Institute for Credentialing Excellence, as follows:¹³

Certificates of attendance or participation are provided to individuals who have attended or participated in classes, courses, or other educational training programs. The certificate awarded at the completion of the program or event signifies that the participant was present and, in some cases, that the participant actively participated in the program or event. Participants' demonstration of accomplishment of the intended learning outcomes is not a requirement for receiving the certificate; thus, possession of a certificate of attendance or participation does not indicate that the participant has accomplished the intended learning outcomes.¹³

In contrast, ***professional or personal certification*** is a voluntary process by which individuals are evaluated against predetermined standards for knowledge, skills, or competencies. Participants who demonstrate that they meet the standards by successfully completing the assessment process are granted a time-limited credential. Furthermore, in order to retain the credential, certified professionals must maintain continued competence. The credential awarded by the certification program provider denotes that the participant possesses particular knowledge, skills, or competencies.¹³

In general terms, the differences between certification and a certificate can be summarized as follows:¹⁶

Certification	Certificate
Results from an assessment process	Results from an educational process
Typically requires some amount of professional experience	For both entry-level and experienced professionals
Awarded by a third-party, standard-setting organization	Awarded by an educational program or institution
Indicates mastery/competency as measured against a defensible set of standards, usually by application or exam	Indicates completion of a course or series of courses with a specific focus; is different from a degree-granting program
Standards set through a defensible, industry-wide process (job analysis) that results in an outline of required knowledge and skills	Course content determined in a variety of ways (e.g., by a faculty committee or workshop leader)
Typically confers a designation to use after one's name	Usually listed on a resume detailing education; may issue a paper certificate
Requires ongoing maintenance; holder must demonstrate he/she continues to meet requirements	Is a final result; demonstrates knowledge of course content at the end of a set period in time

Unfortunately, the existence of unaccredited wound care certifications and wound care certificate pathways causes confusion and a lack of standardization within the industry. This is further compounded by organizations promoting certifications that offer the same certification exam and credentials, irrespective of the applicant's level of education or expertise. An organization that grants one certification exam and credential, while not differentiating certifications by academic level and professional license, creates a liability for health-care organizations and promotes a dangerous situation for patients.

It should be noted that both the ABWM and the WOCNCB accredited wound care certifications differentiate educational levels, while other organizations that offer nonaccredited certifications and certificates of completion present the same testing level for each test, whether the individual is a licensed practical nurse (LPN), registered nurse (RN), Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), or medical doctor (MD).

VIII. Opportunities for Health Professionals with Accredited Certification

In addition to raising standards in wound care and improving the lives of patients, accredited certification offers tangible benefits to the certified professionals themselves, in terms of both enhanced peer-group respect and career prospects. Over 90% of the 11,000 certified and noncertified nurses surveyed by the ABNS stated that achieving and maintaining accredited certification validates the holder's specialized knowledge and ability, enhances professional credibility, and indicates a level of clinical competence among peer workers.¹⁷ Furthermore, over 80% agreed that certification promotes recognition from peers and other health professionals.¹⁷

Some of the many areas of opportunity provided by accredited certification are described below:^{11,17,18}

Raising standards: Demand for skilled and knowledgeable wound care professionals has never been greater. The act of studying for accredited certification exams has a dramatic effect on the student's knowledge and understanding which, when combined with the skills practiced every day in the clinical setting, makes for a formidable combination of expertise and experience. Because accredited certification requires a demonstration of continued competency, it is incumbent on the health-care professional to remain informed of any developments in their specialties. Therefore, as well as being greatly in demand, certified professionals are also raising standards in wound care and driving the discipline forward.

Opening doors: Eighty-six percent of nurse managers questioned in a survey confirmed that if they were presented with two similarly experienced nurses, they would always hire the certified nurse over the noncertified equivalent.¹⁷ Their proven knowledge base and greater professional commitment to lifelong learning were the most common reasons cited.

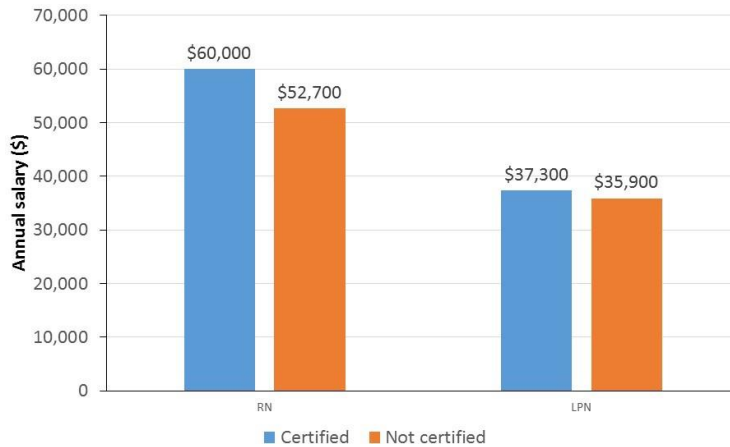
Enhancing professional standing: Accredited certification increases the health-care professional's influence, leading to invitations to participate at the highest level in expert panels, development programs, and other influential forums. The accredited certified wound care professional is likely to enjoy greater opportunities to network and engage with other professionals, both nationally and internationally.

Achieving personal fulfillment: In the ABNS survey of certified and noncertified nurses described earlier, 97% of nurses stated that certification provides personal satisfaction, and 88% agreed that certification

enhances personal confidence in clinical abilities.¹⁷

Enjoying the rewards: Besides the benefits in terms of professional standing and greater professional recognition, the simple truth is that accredited certification often equates with higher pay. In a 2006 salary survey of more than 1,100 nurses, those who reported being certified in a specialty earned \$9,200 more annually than nurses who were not certified.¹⁹

Comparison of annual salary for certified nurses versus noncertified¹⁹



IX. Benefits of Accredited Wound Care Professionals to Medical Facilities

Recognition of the devastating effect that chronic wounds may have on a person’s prognosis and quality of life has led to the inclusion of wound management issues at the heart of government regulations for long-term care, home care, and acute care.⁹ Including an accredited, certified wound care professional on the staff of a long-term care facility greatly reduces the risk of litigation.

As well as mitigating the threat of litigation, the presence of an accredited, certified wound care professional within a medical facility can also reduce the costs associated with wound management.

When the Montefiore Home Health Agency in New York implemented the hiring and training of wound care by accredited wound care professionals, patient costs for wound care problems dropped significantly. Within eight months of the program’s launch, the percentage of patients requiring daily visits dropped from 52% to 20%, resulting in significant cost savings.²⁰ This study also showed the following:

- The percentage of non-healing wounds (not healed 12 weeks after admission) decreased from 33% to 20%.
- In 2013, post-surgery healing rates reached 95% compared with an average of 88% in New York State and 89% nationally. In 2008, before the implementation of the home-care wound program, the hospital's post-surgery healing rate was 86%.²⁰

The substantial costs associated with managing chronic wounds are well documented, and health-care facilities are desperate to reduce this cost burden through prevention and effective wound management. Pressure ulcers illustrate this point clearly. The prevalence of pressure ulcers is reported to be 26% among hospitalized patients, 43% among patients in nursing homes, and 39% among patients with spinal cord injuries.²¹ A 2010 retrospective analysis of patients with stage IV pressure ulcers reported an average hospital treatment cost of \$129,248 for hospital-acquired ulcers during one admission. The equivalent value for community-acquired ulcers over an average of four admissions was \$124,327. This high cost is particularly relevant because of the classification of hospital-acquired stage III and IV pressure ulcers as a “never event” that will not be reimbursed.

Halting the progression of early-stage pressure ulcers therefore avoids unnecessary pain and suffering and can reduce health-care expenditures by millions of dollars. Therefore, health-care professionals specializing in wound prevention and management have become sought-after employees in all areas of patient care, and wound care is becoming recognized as a specialty area of practice.²²

X. Benefits of Accredited Wound Care Professionals to Patients

Of all the benefits of accredited certification in wound care, the most important is the benefit to the very patients who are served by wound care professionals. One analysis of 652 nonfederal hospitals reported that a 10% increase in baccalaureate staff nurses decreased 30-day mortality by 6%, and by 2% in the case of certified baccalaureate nurses.²³ Furthermore, nurses who are certified in wound care have been shown to have greater nursing knowledge. In one study, a convenience sample of 460 nurses were asked to complete a standardized pressure ulcer knowledge test. Nurses certified in wound care were reported to score 89% on the test, compared with 78% for nurses certified in other specialties. Nurses with no certification scored the lowest, with 76.5%.²⁴

Finally, patients with selected wound-care-related conditions who were managed by nurses with an accredited certification in wound care showed a higher marked improvement when compared with patients treated by nonaccredited certified nurses:²⁵

Clinical Condition	Noncertified Wound Care Nurse	Certified Wound Care Nurse
Pressure ulcers	5.7%	5.0%
Stasis ulcers	1.8%	1.5%
Surgical wounds	36.3%	27.5%
Urinary incontinence	49.4%	43.3%
Bowel incontinence	16.4%	16.5%
Urinary tract infections	10.4%	8.2%

XI. Conclusions

There are many advantages associated with achieving accredited wound care certification. Most important are the benefits to patients, who can be confident that they are receiving the best possible care from a provider with current knowledge in the area of wound management. A certified professional will benefit from greater career opportunities, greater respect among colleagues, and a level of personal fulfillment. Finally, medical facilities employing certified wound care professionals also benefit from this qualification, as they are more likely to achieve optimal patient outcomes, are less likely to be subject to litigation, and may reduce their costs of treating wounds through more effective management.

Because of the growing interest in wound certification, many organizations have seized the opportunity to offer programs that they claim lead to accredited wound care certification. However, it is essential to recognize that not all wound certifications are the same. Many wound care certifications fall well below industry standards, involve no rigorous testing, are not externally audited, and are not accredited. The rise of nonaccredited certifications in wound care creates confusion in the industry and a false sense of security due to the lack of differentiation between educational level and professional license, ultimately endangering patients and facilities. Achieving certification in a particular area of expertise is a worthwhile and noble pursuit, with tangible benefits for patients, employers, and the professionals themselves. However, before embarking on a certification program, it is worth taking the time to research the

available options. The certification exam preparation course should be rigorous and commensurate with the learner's level of education and academic degree, and it should prepare the individual for an accredited certification. The benefits of such a program and certification would ensure that the individual's credentials meet industry standards and carry the prestige of a formal accredited certification.

Glossary of Terms

ABNS	American Board of Nursing Specialties
ABSNC	Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification
ABWM	American Board of Wound Management
ADRN	Associate Degree Registered Nurse
APRN	Advanced Practice Registered Nurse
AWCC	Advanced Wound Care Certification
BSN	Bachelor of Science in Nursing
CWCA	Certified Wound Care Associate
CWCN	Certified Wound Care Nurse
CWS	Certified Wound Specialist
CWSP	Certified Wound Specialist Physician
CE	Continuing Education
DO	Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine
DPM	Doctor of Podiatric Medicine
ICE	Institute for Credentialing Excellence
LPN	Licensed Practical Nurse
MD	Medical Doctor
NCCA	National Commission for Certifying Agencies Registered Nurse
RN	Registered Nurse
WOCNB	Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nursing Certification Board

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