

# Oncology Nursing Certification: Relation to Nurses' Knowledge and Attitudes About Pain, Patient-Reported Pain Care Quality, and Pain Outcomes

Susan L. Beck, PhD, APRN, AOCN<sup>®</sup>, FAAN, Jeannine M. Brant, PhD, RN, AOCN<sup>®</sup>, FAAN, Rebecca Donohue, PhD, FNP-BC, AOCN<sup>®</sup>, APNG, Ellen M. Lavoie Smith, PhD, APN-BC, AOCN<sup>®</sup>, Gail L. Towsley, PhD, Patricia H. Berry, PhD, RN, ACHPN<sup>®</sup>, FPCN, FAAN, Jia-Wen Guo, PhD, RN, Sharifa Al-Qaaydeh, MS, RN, Marjorie A. Pett, MStat, DSW, and Gary Donaldson, PhD

Beck is a professor and the Robert S. and Beth M. Carter Endowed Chair in the College of Nursing at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City; Brant is an oncology clinical nurse specialist and nurse scientist at the Billings Clinic in Montana; Donohue is an oncology nurse practitioner at the Cancer Center of Acadiana in Lafayette, LA; Smith is an associate professor and PhD program director in the School of Nursing at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor; Towsley is an associate professor in the College of Nursing at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City; Berry is a professor in the School of Nursing at Oregon Health and Science University in Portland; Guo and Al-Qaaydeh are both assistant professors, and Pett is a professor emerita, all in the College of Nursing at the University of Utah; and Donaldson is a professor in the Department of Anesthesiology at the University of Utah.

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Beck, Brant, Smith, Towsley, and Berry contributed to the conceptualization and design. Beck, Brant, Smith, Towsley, Berry, and Al-Qaaydeh completed the data collection. Pett, Donaldson, and Guo provided statistical support. Beck, Donohue, Guo, Pett, and Donaldson contributed to the analysis. All of the authors contributed to the manuscript preparation.

Beck can be reached at susan.beck@nurs.utah.edu, with copy to editor at ONFEditor@ons.org.

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**Purpose/Objectives:** To (a) compare pain knowledge and attitudes between nurses with oncology certified nurse (OCN<sup>®</sup>) status, non-OCN<sup>®</sup>-certified nurses, and nurses ineligible for certification and (b) examine the relationships among OCN<sup>®</sup> status, nurses' knowledge and attitudes about pain, patient-reported quality of nursing pain care, and pain outcomes.

**Design:** Prospective, correlational survey design. Patients were nested within nurses.

**Setting:** Six inpatient oncology units in three hospitals: St. Vincent Healthcare in Billings, Montana; Norris Cotton Cancer Center at the Dartmouth–Hitchcock Medical Center in Lebanon, New Hampshire; and Huntsman Cancer Hospital in Salt Lake City, Utah.

**Sample:** 91 nurses in three states (28 OCN<sup>®</sup>-certified nurses, 37 noncertified nurses, and 26 not eligible for certification). Certification status was validated for 105 nurses who were matched with a sample of 320 patients.

**Methods:** Nurses completed a survey, and matched adult patients who were experiencing pain rated their pain care quality and pain experience during the past shift.

**Main Research Variables:** Demographic characteristics, certification status, and responses to the Nurse Knowledge and Attitudes Survey Regarding Pain (NKASRP), Pain Care Quality Survey–Nursing, and modified Brief Pain Inventory (Short Form).

**Findings:** OCN<sup>®</sup>-certified nurses scored significantly higher on the NKASRP (82% correct) compared to non-OCN<sup>®</sup> eligible nurses (76%) and non-OCN<sup>®</sup> ineligible nurses (74%) ( $p < 0.001$ ). Only 43% overall achieved a benchmark of 80% correct. No statistically significant relationships existed between (a) certification status and pain care quality or pain outcomes or (b) NKASRP and care quality or outcomes ( $p > 0.05$ ).

**Conclusions:** OCN<sup>®</sup>-certified nurses' knowledge and attitudes related to pain management were superior to noncertified nurses. Neither knowledge and attitudes nor OCN<sup>®</sup> status were associated with pain care quality or pain outcomes.

**Implications for Nursing:** Knowledge is necessary but insufficient to improve patient outcomes; providing optimal pain care requires action. Sustained efforts to improve cancer pain management are indicated.

Oncology nursing certification serves as an indicator of specialized knowledge that theoretically should result in improved quality of care and patient outcomes. In a position statement on certification, the Oncology Nursing Society ([ONS], 2015) stated, “Oncology nursing certification provides validation of the specialized knowledge and experience required for competent performance” (para. 1). Despite this, limited empirical evidence exists to support the relationship between status as an oncology certified nurse (OCN<sup>®</sup>) and nursing knowledge, quality of care, or patient outcomes.