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THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE: The Journey to Nursing Certification

By Sal Chiappe RN, OCN

“The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.” - **VINCE LOMBARDI**

Coach Lombardi was a cultivator of excellence; to excel at what you do should be a priority we bring to the workplace every day. The Journey to Nursing Certification is both voluntary and time consuming; the rewards are many such as:

- Professional recognition
- Financial compensation
- Job mobility
- Career advancement

Medscape.com reports that “86% of nursing employers would hire a certified nurse over a non-certified nurse if all qualifications were the same”

Nurse certification is a relatively new idea that did not begin until 1974, but in the span of almost 40 years it has exploded to include at least 79 Nursing Certification Boards. These boards cover everything from AIDS Certified RN to Lamaze Certified Childbirth Educator (LCCE), a veritable alphabet of nursing certifications.

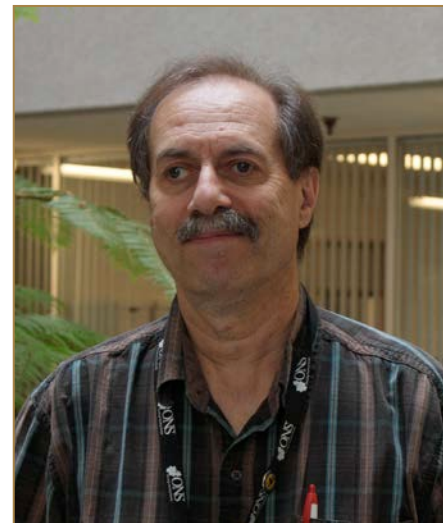
As an Oncology Certified Nurse OCN at the UCSD Moores’ Cancer Center, I am surrounded by some of the best nurses I have ever worked with; they bring a wealth of experience that if added up would amount to hundreds of years. One of the partners of nursing excellence is the nursing experience that my colleagues bring to the Cancer Center; they encourage the newer nurses in Oncology not only to pursue Nurse Certification in Oncology but to excel in their profession. These qualities

provide the mentoring and the guidance that my newer co-workers both seek and desire. As a nurse with 27 years of experience I can say honestly that I am still learning about my profession. Nursing, like a lot of areas of medicine, has evolved into a specialty profession, as evidenced by the amount of Nursing Certification Boards now in existence.

When I went to nursing school in the 80’s before the home computer became a fact of life, nursing was more centered at the bedside. Now nurses have more opportunities to showcase their skills and to obtain certification for their area of practiced proficiency.

Part of the journey to certification includes belonging to organizations in your specialty, partaking in conferences and journal clubs. These are venues where professional growth takes place; part of that professional growth includes stepping up to the plate and obtaining that certification when you are ready.

The first time I took the exam for OCN I failed, I had only been at the Cancer Center a short time and in retrospect I should have waited. Failure can be the road to success because in failure you double your efforts to succeed the next time. I passed on the second attempt at the exam a few years later because I had experienced more and was able to apply it to the whole of Oncology. Life is full of goals and one of those goals as a nurse should be Nurse Certification. I know that on



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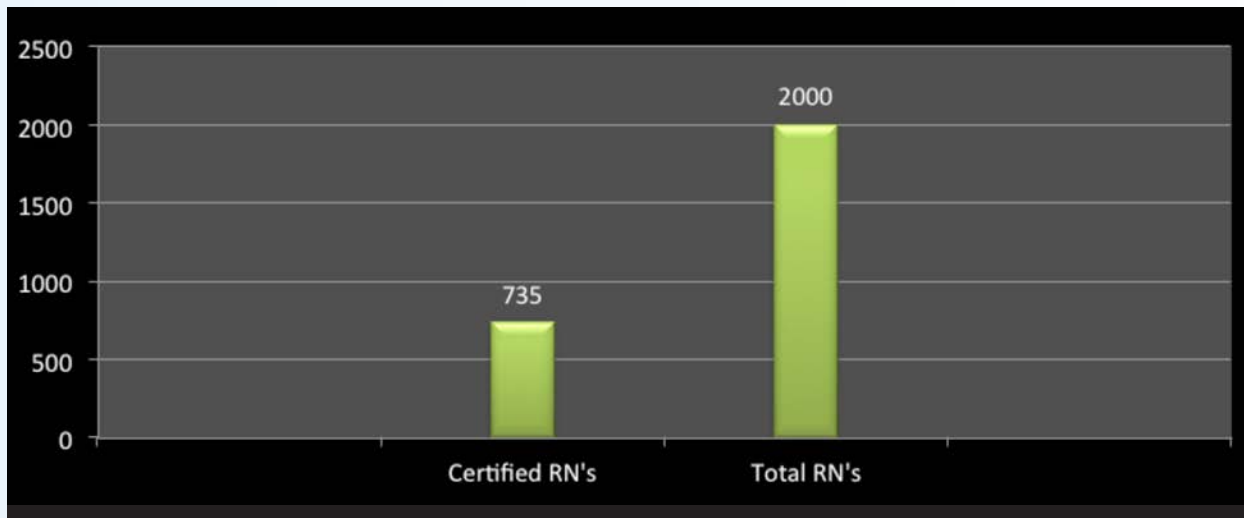
Hobbies- Astronomy, writing Poetry

Favorite Sports team-New York Yankees

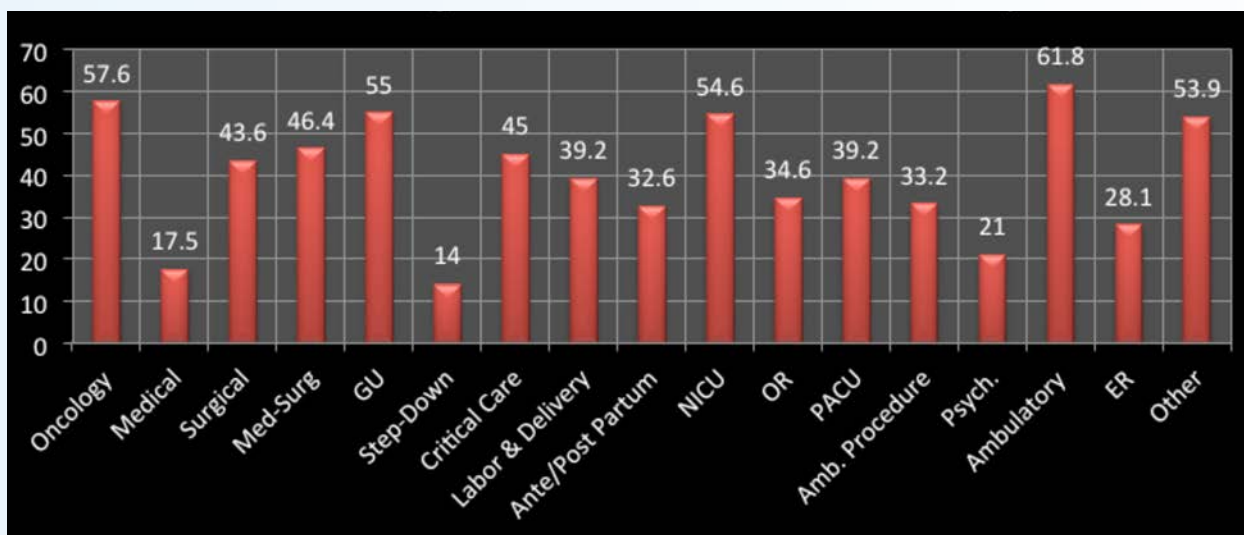
several occasions I have been asked what the letters on my ID badge stand for. When I explain what OCN means my patients like what it represents. Recognition by your peers and your patients gives you a sense of fulfillment and contentment in the job you do; working with people every day who are cancer patients is both challenging and rewarding. Bringing the best skill set we can every day to our patients is what they need and deserve.

Once a year the UCSD Image of Nursing Council takes time out to honor all Nurses who have obtained certification, the nurses are given a Certificate of Recognition to recognize that accomplishment. This recognition

Number of Certified Nurses at UC San Diego (2012 data)



Percentage of Certified UC San Diego RN's by Area



speaks to the professionalism and leadership in achieving and maintaining national board certification in a nursing specialty. At present, 37% of all the RN's at UCSD have obtained certification on our road to excellence.

Besides recognizing our certified nurses, the Image Council has played an invaluable role in enhancing the image of nursing at UCSD in many other ways. We are proud of our nurses and we want to promote that image locally and within the community.

To that end, our mission includes:

- To insure a positive and professional nurse image at UC San Diego Health System

- To provide an opportunity to showcase positive accomplishments for our nursing staff via the nursing journal, web site and professional recognition events
- To continue to elevate the recognition status of the professionally accomplished and engaged UC San Diego nurse

As a founding member of the Image of Nursing Council I have been privileged to work with some of the most innovative people I have ever met in the field of nursing. The Image Council from its inception has delivered this mission. This council has pioneered the following items:

- Founded the UCSD Nursing website

- Founded the UCSD Journal of Nursing
- Annual Nurse of the Year selection
- Annual celebration of Certified Nurses
- Magnet Pinning Ceremony
- Community outreach projects at San Diego County schools career days
- Annual Nurses week Celebration in May

“The secret of joy in work is contained in one word - excellence. To know how to do something well is to enjoy it.” - PEARL BUCK