In May/June 2020, the American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) surveyed 56 U.S.-based credentialing organizations to describe the scope of specialty certifications available to RNs and advanced practice RNs (APRNs). Forty-four (79%) responded, including 30 of ABNS’s 31 members.

Over 1 Million Specialty Certified RNs

Top Specialty Areas

What is Certification?

Benefits of nursing specialty certification include:

- Superior clinical expertise, safety and ethics
- Improved patient and organizational outcomes
- Greater nurse career success and satisfaction
- Advancements in specialty practice and nursing

To become specialty certified, also known as board certified, RNs must pass a rigorous, national exam that validates their clinical and professional knowledge and judgment in a well-defined specialty practice area.

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For each credential they offer, respondents were asked to select up to three specialty or subspecialty areas that best describe the primary practice focus of the nurses holding that credential.

Critical Care (27)
Pediatrics (17)
Neonatal Care (13)
Medical-Surgical (12)
Wound/Ostomy/Continence (12)
Disease-specific (11)
Emergency (11)
Hospice/Palliative Care (10)
Ambulatory Care (9)
Cardiac Care (9)
Case Management (8)
Hematology/Oncology (8)
Psychiatric-Mental Health (8)

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More on Accreditation

Accreditation is a rigorous peer-review process that affirms an individual certification program complies with established credentialing industry standards of excellence.

Of the 106 accredited nursing specialty certification programs, 67 are ABSNC® accredited and 53 are NCCA® accredited, with 14 by both.

Certification and accreditation promote excellence and ethics, inspire confidence, drive better patient outcomes, and help ensure the safety, health, and welfare of patients and the public at large.

Sources & Notes

1American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) definition of specialty certification retrieved from http://www.nursingcertification.org/about-ABNS.
2The Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC) focuses solely on nursing certification programs.
3The National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) accredits programs across a wide range of professions and industries.
4Access to the ABSNC’s "A Commitment to Quality and Care: The Importance of Accreditation for Certifying Organizations and Their Members."