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Learning Objectives

1. Define certification and its value to the individual, the employer and the professional association.
2. Identify the role a department mission statement plays in establishing a department certification program.
3. Discuss the steps for establishing a staff certification program.
4. Explain how a department staff certification program supports state mandated certification efforts.

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Credentialing healthcare professionals:

A staff certification program that works

by Richard Schule, BS, MBA, CRCST, CHMMC, FCS, CST, FAST

Certification is one of the most important steps you will take in your professional career. Earning certification credentials expresses to the rest of the industry and your professional colleagues that you are serious about your career and its responsibilities. Just as graduating from a technical or clinical training program or earning an academic degree does, obtaining certification solidifies your commitment and involvement with your profession.

Credentialing evolved from a perceived need to protect the public health, safety, and welfare.¹ The term *credentialing* encompasses accreditation, licensure, and certification. Licensure and certification are the most common methods.² Professional associations may use certification as an encouragement for professional growth; as an assessment of the basic entry level or advanced level of competence of its practitioners; as evidence to the public of a body of expert knowledge; or as a mechanism to advance the standards and knowledge of the specialty.³ For some, this is not an easy road, but those who persevere eventually achieve this level of expertise and best practice.

However, what if it wasn't a matter of persevering, but of supported achievement? Could sterile processing department managers make the preparation process easier? Could they provide a program in their departments that takes the guesswork out of the process of achieving certification? What if the department not only promoted certification, but actually worked to achieve certification as a team of colleagues?

What's in it for everyone?

Although it's not difficult, establishing and maintaining certification programs takes motivation, determination and perseverance. So, why set up a staff certification program? In general, employers use certification programs as a way to improve the staff's levels of expertise and competency, and thereby improve the organization. A review of avail-

able literature suggests that there are additional benefits for the employees:

- Opens up a broader range of job opportunities
- Provides a challenge
- Strengthens commitment to professionalism
- Increases job satisfaction
- Provides personal achievement and satisfaction
- Improves earning potential
- Fulfills a professional obligation
- Offers professional prestige or status
- Validates knowledge.⁴

Getting started

Establishing a staff certification program should begin with developing a departmental mission statement. Mission statements establish a clear focus for the staff and a pathway for staff to follow. Here are two examples of mission statements:

(Major health system, Cleveland, Ohio): "To provide better care of the sick, investigation of their problems and further education for those who serve."

(Large Midwest health system; sterile processing department): "Our team mission is to prevent healthcare-acquired infections by providing clean and sterile items on time

Hospital Logo Design

Sterile Processing Department

MISSION STATEMENT

As a Sterile Processing professional, our team mission is to **prevent hospital-acquired infections** by providing clean and sterile items on time to our customers, while maintaining the highest industry standards.

Signed By
First Name
Last Name
Sr. Management, Perioperative Services

Signed By
First Name
Last Name
Sr. Management, Sterile Processing



Example of a Wall of Achievement

to our customers, while maintaining the highest industry standards.”

It's easy to see how certification would support the knowledge foundation required to support and carry out these two missions. It's important to establish the mission statement before initiating any education or certification program. The entire team should participate in developing it, to assure their commitment to the mission once it's determined. The statement should then be posted throughout the department where it can be easily read, as a constant reminder and commitment for everyone interacting with the team.

The next steps

Meet with your team to discuss the feasibility of certification. Explain the importance of having a foundation of knowledge that will benefit the department and its customers. The objectives for this meeting are: (1) Establish the department mission statement; (2) Define certification for your professional group; and (3) Identify the criteria and prerequisites for sitting for the relevant national certification exams.

Examples of clinical and technical professionals and their respective certifications are: the infection preventionist (CIC); the perioperative nurse (CNOR); the surgical technologist (CST); the central service or sterile processing technician (CRCST); the gastrointestinal nurse (CGNA); technician (CSPDT); flexible endoscope reprocessor (CFER); surgical instrument processor (CSIP); ambulatory surgery sterile processing technician (CASSPT); supervisor

(CSPDS); manager (CSPDM); instrument specialist (CIS); and certification in healthcare leadership (CHL) and healthcare materiel management concepts (CHMMC). Information about these and other certification courses and exams can be obtained from their respective professional organizations and websites:

- Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN) - www.aorn.org
- Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC) - www.apic.org
- Association of Surgical Technologists (AST) - www.ast.org
- Certification Board for Sterile Processing and Distribution - sterileprocessing.org
- The International Association of Healthcare Central Service Materiel Management (IAHCSMM) - www.iahcsmm.org
- The Society of Gastroenterology Nurses and Associates (SGNA) - www.sgna.org

Get the program up and running

Once your team understands the value of certification and has an established mission and focus, the next step is to establish the certification program. Select which organization best fits your team's needs and gather all the necessary information: eligibility requirements, courses needed, text books and their costs, course materials, and the certification exam. Finally and most importantly, research the criteria for *supporting and maintaining certification* once it is earned. Becoming certified is the first step in your professional career, but maintaining your certi-

fication and expanding on your knowledge through continued education is what truly shows your commitment to the profession. Continuing education helps us remain current with the latest recommended practices and standards and teaches how to best apply new technology to deliver state-of-the-art services and quality patient care. Although the ultimate responsibility lies with each certified professional, the department can facilitate and support continuing education by having this information readily available for reference.

In addition to documenting and posting your department's mission statement for all to read, it's also important to document the procedure for obtaining certification through the department's certification program. Having it in writing establishes the step-by-step procedure and identifies commitment to the program. In addition, it makes follow-through and succession planning simpler for future administrators of the department.

Don't let the bucks stop you

Do not let budgets keep you from establishing and maintaining your certification and continuing education programs. Education must be valued as an investment in the organization's future, and should be prioritized with that in mind. You will have to be creative at times, but there are ways to stretch your dollars and optimize what you have available.

For example, copyright laws prohibit the copying or replicating of textbooks and

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SELF-STUDY from page 33

course materials without the original author's permission. To get the most use of materials for the department, you can establish a department library and purchase twelve sets, for example, of course materials for the certification program. Instruct the students not to write in their study materials, but to make notes on a writing tablet to document their answers and course work. This will allow you to extend the use of your education dollars.

Another creative way of obtaining education funding is through education grants offered by your state or local government. Education support is also available through some of your vendors, but caution is advised regarding this option. ADVAMED dictates specific rules regarding what company representatives can and cannot offer their customers. Review the ADVAMED language and discuss it with your hospital administrators before seeking outside financial support.

Celebrate success, and not just for fun

Once staff members receive their certifications, it is important to celebrate their successes. Celebrating not only acknowledges individual hard work and achievement, but also provides a source of motivation for the rest of the team. One way to celebrate is to select a wall in the department or the hallway adjacent to the department and hang all the achievement certificates in attractive frames for all to see.

Be part of the bigger healthcare picture

Establishing a departmental certification program will help your team members realize their full potential and will prepare them for national certification. The credentialing checklist below can provide a framework for getting your program started. A team that understands all the relevant recommended standards, best practices, and science behind healthcare processes has the power to improve the quality of their products and services, and ultimately to contribute to world class patient care. If it achieves national certification and recognition, the team establishes a benchmark for others to emulate.

Several professional organizations around the country are currently seeking legislative support for state-mandated certification or licensure. In addition, the federal government is looking for ways to deliver quality healthcare that is cost-efficient. Credentialed professionals armed with best practice knowledge and technical and clinical expertise will be able to help lower healthcare costs by reducing inefficiency and human error, and by preventing infections. These improvements, in turn, have the potential to elevate the quality and efficiency of healthcare nationally over time. **HPN**

Richard Schule is the director of Clinical Education at STERIS Corporation. In this role, he is responsible for a team of experienced clinical professionals and a portfolio of surgical and sterile processing continuing education and in-service

programs for healthcare providers. Schule has authored numerous articles and contributed to text development and review for the Central Service Technical Manual, 7th Edition and the chapter on "Safety in Central Service" to IAHCSSM's book Central Service Technical Manual, 6th Edition. He has served on various editorial advisory boards, such as the First Moves and Healthcare Purchasing News panels. He has also served on Kimberly-Clark's CS Advisory Panel, 3M's Speakers Panel and Advanced Sterilization Products Clinical Advisory Committee. Schule holds a Bachelor of Science degree in healthcare management from Southern Illinois University and an MBA from the University of Phoenix. He is a member of the Association for the Advancement of Medical Instrumentation (AAMI), the Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN), the American Society for Quality (ASQ), the Association of Surgical Technologists (AST), and the International Association of Healthcare Central Service Materiel Management (IAHCSSM). He holds office at the local and national level in IAHCSSM, and received the Ruth Anne Brooks Past-President Award in 1998 and 2000, and the Bertha Yanis Litsky, Ph.D. Educator of the Year Award in 2004.

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3. Pugliese G, Larson E, Brandt Foote S, Jackson MM, Hierholzer WJ: Certification: Philosophy, goals, and methods, with application to the discipline of infection control practice. *Washington DC, 1986, American Journal of Infection Control* 14:11-19.
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Credentialing Program Checklist:		
Item		Completion Date
1.	Develop your department's mission statement with your staff.	
2.	Identify the appropriate certification program(s) for your staff.	
3.	Contact the certifying professional organization for information.	
4.	Meet with your staff and set goals for achieving 100% staff certification.	
5.	Establish standing day(s) and time(s) for class or review classes.	
6.	Develop a timeline to plan and document milestones within your strategy to achieve goal.	
7.	Establish commitment and make this a standing objective in your MBO (manage by objective) process.	
8.	Purchase course materials.	
9.	Schedule the first class, distribute and review materials.	
10.	Establish department in-service or training schedule to begin the continuing education process.	
11.	Establish a record system to maintain department and individual training data.	
12.	Celebrate successes and post certificates in a public area of the department.	
13.	Promote the department up the chain to hospital administrators and physicians. Use the organization's newsletter and intranet site as allowed by hospital policy.	

Credentialing healthcare professionals: A staff certification program that works

Circle the one correct answer:

- 1. What are some of the reasons for setting up a staff certification program?**

 - A. Validates knowledge.
 - B. Strengthens commitment to professionalism.
 - C. Increases job satisfaction.
 - D. Improves earning potential.
 - E. All of the above.
- 2. What should be identified first before initiating any department staff certification program?**

 - A. Number of employees interested.
 - B. Administrative support.
 - C. Department mission statement.
 - D. Consult with the education department.
 - E. None of the above.
- 3. Who should participate in the development of the department mission statement to assure commitment?**

 - A. Human resource staff.
 - B. Department management personnel only.
 - C. The entire team.
 - D. The director of infection control.
 - E. B and D.
- 4. Once it is developed and agreed upon, where should the department mission statement be posted?**

 - A. Outside the entrance door to the department.
 - B. Main lobby of the healthcare facility.
 - C. Cafeteria.
 - D. Throughout the department.
 - E. A and B.
- 5. Which is required when developing and establishing a department certification program?**

 - A. Identify the professional organization that best fits your team's needs.
 - B. Gather information relative to eligibility requirements, textbooks and required readings, and associated costs.
 - C. Investigate how and at what time of the year the certification exam is delivered.
 - D. Understand the criteria required for supporting and maintaining your certification.
 - E. All of the above.
- 6. Which activity will help to encourage commitment to the certification program?**

 - A. Establish in writing a step-by-step procedure for obtaining and maintaining certification.
 - B. Send out periodic e-mail reminders.
 - C. Create a newsletter.
 - D. Both B and C.
 - E. None of the above.
- 7. Education must be valued and recognized as an investment in the staff by the healthcare organization. Identify a creative way your department can obtain help for your program.**

 - A. Establish a department library to share textbooks and required readings.
 - B. Seek support from your local vendor representatives or directly from the original equipment manufacturers (OEM).
 - C. Education grants offered by local, state and federal government.
 - D. Course scholarships through professional organizations.
 - E. All the above.
- 8. Which of the following places restrictions on a vendor's ability to offer grants and other types of support to their customers?**

 - A. Food and Drug Administration (FDA).
 - B. Advanced Medical Technology Association (AdvaMed).
 - C. Sarbanes-Oxley Act 2002.
 - D. Hospital policies.
 - E. B and D.
- 9. When establishing a certification program it is important to recognize staff when their certification is achieved. How might this be best accomplished?**

 - A. Post the certificates on a public wall in the department.
 - B. Call the local newspaper.
 - C. Place their name in the hospital newsletter.
 - D. A and C.
 - E. All of the above.
- 10. How does a department certification program help improve the quality of products and services delivered?**

 - A. It helps the staff understand the relevance of recommended standards, best practices, and science behind healthcare processes.
 - B. It helps the staff achieve a certification outside the scope of their practice.
 - C. It helps frontline staff know how to administer patient care procedures.
 - D. B and C only.
 - E. None of the above.



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