

WHY I'M

a CNA orthopaedic-certified nurse

BY LOUISA POTHIER, BScN, RN, ONC(C)

I've been an orthopaedic nurse for four decades.

I retired in August, but I graduated in 1975 and have been working in musculoskeletal care since 1978, so I've spent most of my career in orthopedics. I've also been involved with orthopedics through the Canadian Orthopaedic Nursing Association, and this year it celebrates its 40th year.

Unfortunately, the number of nurses getting their orthopaedic certification is dropping. The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) has put this specialty on "retirement mode" and is considering pulling the plug on this certification altogether. Orthopaedic certification has to be financially supported, and without the numbers, they lack sufficient financial backing to continue the program.

This is an issue that threatens ongoing nursing education and excellence, and will also affect patient outcomes in the future.

Spreading the knowledge

Orthopaedics is one of 21 specialties recognized by CNA. Right now, there are about 17,500 RNs that are certified in one of the 21 nursing practice specialties. Orthopaedics is one of those specialties, and we gained specialty status in 2006, when the first writing of the specialty certification exams took place.

There are a number of reasons why certification numbers are low. One of the reasons is awareness of who should be getting this certification. Here's something you may not know: you don't need to work in an orthopedic clinic or unit to be ideally suited for orthopaedic certification.

There are orthopaedic-type patients or patients with musculoskeletal disorders across every health-care facility, in every community, everywhere across Canada. Not every area has orthopaedic-specific nursing units but this does not mean that the nurses caring for this patient population do not need a specific body of knowledge.

For example, if you work in a small community hospital, you might not have an orthopedic unit. You might have a surgical unit, and on those surgical units are orthopedic patients. If you work in any area with orthopedic patients, this certification is for you.

The other reason for declining numbers is that there's a cost associated with writing these exams. One of the things we want to share is that there are many different funding opportunities, and all you need to do is apply. Alberta Registered Nurses Educational Trust (ARNET), for example, provided over \$570,000 to nurses in 2017 specifically for specialty nursing certification!

What does orthopedic certification bring to the table?

The Canadian Orthopaedic Nurses Association believes certification demonstrates to the people one works with, and to the organization one works for, that person's commitment to lifelong learning. It instills confidence, knowledge and informed decision-making in the individual, which benefits the patients they care for, their colleagues and their employers.

Orthopaedic certification doesn't only focus on one area. For example, there is a paediatric component to orthopaedics. I don't work in paediatrics, but I now have at least a knowledge base, or I know where to find that information, which I wouldn't have known otherwise.

It also connects you to others in different specialty areas. I know who to go to for information on a geriatric patient, for example. There's a geriatric specialty group. I can contact them for information on caring for geriatric patients with fractured hips.

We're here to help

From a local, provincial and national level, the Canadian Orthopaedic Nursing Association has committed to helping nurses get their orthopaedic certification.

We've developed a mentorship program where nurses who are certified will help any nurse looking to get their certification, both with studying and assisting them through the process. We have planned presentations and education days about bone and joint health, sports injuries and other orthopaedic topics to spread awareness of how important this knowledge is in all practice settings.

We are holding education sessions to help nurses prepare for the certification exam writing. The next writing of the exam is in fall 2018. Registration to write the certification exam is from June 1 to September 10, with the writing to take place between Nov. 1 and 15, 2018.

One of our educational days will address the competencies outlined in the certification exams. Nurses can come for the full day or any part of the day to learn about paediatric bone and joint disease, fractures and fracture management, sports injuries, pre- and post-operative care, total joint replacements and a number of other orthopaedic topics.

If you are interested in attending one of these education sessions or just talking to a certified nurse about the benefits of certification and how to get started, please visit our website.

Remember, getting your CNA orthopaedic certification isn't just something you do to pad your resumé. There are proven benefits for your community, your practice setting and your patient's outcomes. These are the things that all nurses strive for during their careers.

That's why I'm a CNA orthopaedic-certified nurse – and why I encourage you to be also. **RN**

CNA website: www.cna-nurse.org
CNA website: www.cna-aiic.ca/en/certification