

# Exploring End-of-Life Knowledge and Attitudes Toward Certification Among Oncology and Palliative Care Nurses



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## Background

- In 2008, a consensus panel was formed to develop recommendations to help guide hospitals in developing and sustaining palliative care programs.
- Recommendations fell within twelve domains and were created to serve as benchmarks for new and existing programs including the educational domain which is the focus of this study.

- Hospital based oncology and palliative care nurses are called upon to provide end-of-life care on a daily basis for those that they serve. The amount of formal training gained in schools of nursing specific to end-of-life care varies among educational institutions.

- Exploring what is known about end-of-life care is essential in creating programs to meet the informational needs of these staff members. The ONS research agenda includes issues in End of Life as a research priority.

- Professional nursing certification is one means of validating theoretical knowledge in a specialty area.

## Purpose

The overall purpose of this study was to evaluate end-of-life knowledge and perceived value of certification among oncology and palliative care nurses in a community hospital setting.

The specific aims of this study were to:

- Evaluate knowledge specific to end-of-life care among oncology and palliative care nurses
- Determine the perceived value of certification among oncology and palliative care nurses.

## Methods

- Thirty-three Registered Nurses employed by a community hospital on the oncology and palliative care units participated in this descriptive study via an electronic survey. A standard preamble to the study served to inform the participants regarding their rights as a research subject and completion of the survey constituted consent to participate.

- Demographic characteristics were collected in addition to responses to an 18-item Perceived Value of Certification (PVCT) tool and a 50-item version of the End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium Knowledge Assessment Test (ELNEC-KAT).

- Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the PVCT. Total instrument measurement for the PVCT. Intrinsic and Extrinsic values were evaluated.

- Internal Consistency of the ELNEC-KAT was analyzed as well as total scores.

- Group comparisons between oncology and palliative care nurses were summarized.

## Results

### Sample

- 33 Registered Nurses in a community hospital setting
  - 76% of all Oncology Nurses participated
  - 56% of all Palliative Care Nurses participated

Demographics	
Mean Age	37.73 yrs
Age Range	23 – 61 yrs
Female	32 (96.9%)
Caucasian	33 (100%)
Married	27 (81.8%)
Oncology	19 (57.6%)
Palliative Care	14 (42.4%)

Endpoint: Disposed by Nursing



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Specific Aim 1:  
Evaluate knowledge specific to end-of-life care among oncology and palliative care nurses

- Mean overall test scores on the ELNEC-KAT were not significantly different ( $p=.089$ ) for Oncology (85%) and Palliative Care Nurses (80%).

### Scores on ELNEC-KAT (n=26)

	Mean +/- SD
Oncology RNs (16 of 19 completed)	42.69 +/- 3.89
Palliative Care RNs (10 of 14 completed)	39.80 +/- 10.42



Specific Aim 2:  
Determine the perceived value of certification among oncology and palliative care nurses

PVCT Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	No Opinion	Total # Responses
Validates specialized knowledge	53.1% (17)	40.6% (13)	6.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	32
Indicates level of clinical competence	54.8% (17)	35.5% (11)	6.5% (2)	3.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	31
Indicates attainment of a practice standard	46.9% (15)	46.9% (15)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	32
Enhances professional credibility	68.8% (22)	21.9% (7)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	32
Promotes recognition from peers	43.8% (14)	31.3% (10)	15.6% (5)	3.1% (1)	6.3% (2)	32
Promotes recognition from other health professionals	46.9% (15)	40.6% (13)	9.4% (3)	3.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	32
Promotes recognition from employers	40.6% (13)	34.4% (11)	18.8% (6)	0.0% (0)	6.3% (2)	32
Increases consumer confidence	32.3% (10)	58.1% (18)	3.2% (1)	3.2% (1)	3.2% (1)	31
Enhances feeling of personal accomplishment	62.5% (20)	25.0% (8)	6.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	6.3% (2)	32
Enhances personal confidence in clinical abilities	50.0% (16)	37.5% (12)	6.3% (2)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	32
Provides personal satisfaction	61.3% (19)	29.0% (9)	6.5% (2)	0.0% (0)	3.2% (1)	31
Provides professional challenge	59.4% (19)	37.5% (12)	0.0% (0)	3.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	32
Enhances professional autonomy	43.8% (14)	43.8% (14)	6.3% (2)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	32
Indicates professional growth	62.5% (20)	28.1% (9)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	32
Provides evidence of professional commitment	62.5% (20)	28.1% (9)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	32
Provides evidence of accountability	59.4% (19)	25.0% (8)	6.3% (2)	3.1% (1)	6.3% (2)	32
Increases marketability	53.1% (17)	34.4% (11)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	6.3% (2)	32
Increases salary	16.7% (5)	23.3% (7)	23.3% (7)	33.3% (10)	3.3% (1)	30

- Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the PVCT. Internal consistency reliability testing yielded an alpha of .949. Intrinsic Value of Certification yielded an alpha of .959. Extrinsic Value of Certification yielded an alpha of .817.

- Total instrument measurement for the PVCT as well as the Intrinsic and Extrinsic values were evaluated for oncology and palliative care

	Oncology Mean Score	Palliative Care Mean Score	Significantly Different
PVCT (Total Score)	34.6	26.3	NO ( $p=.061$ )
Intrinsic Value	21.8	15.7	YES ( $p=.047$ )
Extrinsic Value	12.8	10.6	NO ( $p=.164$ )

Differences in Sample Characteristics by Specialty			
Variable	Oncology Nurses Mean (SD)	Palliative Care Nurses Mean (SD)	p
Age	39.58 (13.48)	35.21 (12.26)	.347
Years in Nursing	15.32 (11.66)	7.56 (7.17)	.033
% hours weekly spent in providing End-of-Life Care	18.71 (11.33)	36.00 (15.87)	.002

## Summary

- Knowledge of End-of-Life care as measured by the ELNEC-KAT was not significantly different among Oncology (85%) and Palliative Care Nurses (80%).

- Although the overall perceived value of certification was high, intrinsic values of certification were higher among oncology nurses than palliative care nurses.

- Oncology nurses had significantly more years of nursing experience while palliative care nurses reported spending more time per week providing end-of-life care.

## Outcomes

Following this study, the Oncology CNS provided a 10-week Hospice and Palliative Care Certification review course. Participation was voluntary. 6 nurses completed the majority of sessions. 2 palliative care nurses have successfully gained certification and 3 more have scheduled testing. A second review course has been requested and will begin January, 2011.

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