Introduction
Evidence has shown that specialty certification validates nursing knowledge and contributes to personal accomplishment for nurses. The benefit of specialty certification also includes the positive influences on patient care, outcomes, ongoing commitment to professional development, and significantly improves the demographic profile for an organization that aspires to achieve Magnet designation.

Unit council members play an important role because they promote clinical practice accountability for professional development by empowering clinical nurses to take ownership and be accountable for decisions influencing their practice. Our goal as unit council members for FY’16 was to have 20% of our eligible nurses attain specialty certification. This goal would support nurses’ understanding of the importance of certification and benefit our organization’s journey to Magnet designation.

Our unit council created “Dare to Certify” campaign to spearhead our efforts to promote professional development and increase certification for qualified nurses in our unit while also aligning with Jefferson’s core values and the Shared Governance Model.

The campaign aimed to draw attention to the importance of certification, identify the barriers of certification, breakdown barriers to certification, and support staff through the certification process.

Objective/Purpose
1. Create a culture that acknowledges the significance of specialty nursing certification.
2. Identify strategies that will address certification barriers.
3. Design and implement process to diminish barriers to professional nursing certification.

Background
• We tested our campaign in a 45-bed acute medical-surgical unit housed within a 150-bed teaching hospital in Philadelphia.
• The unit had below benchmark percentage of certified nurses.
• At the start of the program, 4 of 36 (11%) RNs had attained a professional certification.
• Realizing the need to increase the number of certified nurses within the unit, the unit council members bundled resources, leadership support and peer support to achieve our goal of certifying as many eligible RNs as possible.
• The campaign “Dare to Certify” was initiated to identify the necessary resources and provide support for qualified nurses to pursue learning to ensure they have the skills and competence needed to care for diverse patient populations.

Process Implementation
First Steps
• Surveyed RNs about why they were not pursuing certification
• Identified and ranked roadblocks and barriers
• Targeted efforts to breakdown the stated roadblocks and barriers

Strategy and Implementation
List of identified roadblocks and barriers to certification and our targeted efforts to overcome them:

• Fear of failure/ Test anxiety/ Expense
  • Success Pays Program/ Fail Safe Certification Program
  • No out-of-pocket cost for nurses
  • Two opportunities to pass
  • Five weeks study plan
  • Free certification prep courses available from CE Direct
  • Reimbursement for prep materials and courses

• Fear of not knowing where to start/ Inadequate study with preparation resources
  • Certification campaign to help RNs get started (Figure 1)
  • Checklist of what needs to be done
  • Talk with co-workers who are already certified

• Fear of doing it alone/ Perceived lack of support
  • Buddy System
  • Campaign to change unit culture to support staff who are eligible

• Fear of doing too much on top of school work
  • Success Pays Program/ Fail Safe Certification Program
  • Five weeks study plan

• Lack of awareness of benefits
  • Certification awareness campaign (Figure 2)
  • Bonus one-time certification pay out for certified nurses

Results
Current Successes
• Percentage of certified RNs increased from 11% to 31% (figure 3)
• 7 additional staff have committed to attaining certification

Conclusion
A survey of the literature will reveal the numerous benefits of obtaining a national specialty certification that includes improved staff retention, foster collaboration amongst staff and increased patient safety. Many organization strive to increase the number of certified nurses, but they need to provide RNs with resources and strategies to overcome identified barriers and roadblocks. Collaborating with unit leadership to plan programs to address identified barriers in earning a specialty certification can lead to increased participation. In addition, cost reduction strategies such as no out of pocket cost, reimbursement for prep materials, certification compensation and incentives help decrease the financial burden for nurses. Creative strategies including a “buddy system” to ensure qualified nurses have a partner to support them through the certification process, also increases staff engagement.

With the implementation of a goal-directed initiative in obtaining national specialty certification, our unit has seen a consistent and gradual increase in medical-surgical nurses seeking certification.

References

Figure 1
Figure 2