The Institute of Medicine (IOM, 2010) report *The Future of Nursing* is being discussed across the spectrum of health care. The report provides guidelines and recommendations that will guide nursing practice through 2020. While certification is not discussed specifically, the report does review the concept of lifelong learning, which can be applied to professional nursing certification.

The IOM (2010) called for nursing schools and nurses to pursue lifelong learning. Recommendations included provisions by health care organizations to provide an environment that promotes lifelong learning, with the resources to make this a reality for practicing nurses. This will help to ensure nurses are capable and qualified to manage the diverse patient populations that are recipients of nursing care. However, a definition of lifelong learning is needed that will include how nurses can work to promote this concept within their careers and use that knowledge as a tool to obtain certification.

Nurses must be self-motivated to learn. Lifelong learning is an adaptation of learning and is a process by which nurses continually seek new information, receive clarity on the information, synthesize the new information into practice, and prepare to learn new information again (Vandeveer, 2009). Knowledge can come from many sources that can enhance evidence-based practice in nursing care delivery. Nurses do this every day, yet they do not appear to acknowledge or appreciate this process as it occurs. Nurses must recognize we are knowledge workers in health care delivery.

Celebrating Certification

Professional nursing certification is one way to celebrate learning achievements. Certification affords nurses the opportunity to reveal competence and proficiency within the specialty area (Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses, 2009). Certification is one way to demonstrate nurses are responsible for their practice by seeking further education and are motivated to provide high-quality care to patients across the life span. Furthermore, certification must be renewed, a process most often done by earning continuing education credits. Nurses who complete these credits clearly demonstrate their commitment to increasing their knowledge within their specialty area.

Are You Certified?

Certification shows you have taken that extra step to validate your knowledge and skills. The Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSN) and the Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board (MSNCB) encourage you to show your colleagues and patients your commitment to excellence in medical-surgical nursing practice. For more information, visit www.msnb.org
Preparing for Certification

Clearly, certification will help to promote lifelong learning. The benefits and professionalism are obvious in certified nurses. However, a challenge is perhaps appropriate for any nurse who currently is certified. The challenge is to step outside the personal comfort zone during endeavors to retain certification. What does this mean?

The certified nurse should make a personal commitment to complete educational units in areas of a known knowledge deficit. Perhaps he or she could complete a seminar on a new treatment or therapy, or learn about something outside the sub-specialty area. When the certified nurse goes to conferences, he or she should attend sessions on topics that are unfamiliar or vaguely familiar as an effort to seek information on intriguing new topics. New learning can be incorporated into practice to touch a patient across the continuum of care.

Nurses owe it to themselves to remember they cannot continue to perform based on maxims, such as, “We’ve always done it this way” or “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” They must allow themselves to grow in the profession and within health care delivery. Following the recommendations from the IOM (2010), nurses can continue to be lifelong learners and should embrace their specialty by pursuing certification. These pursuits may even take nurses back to the classroom to pursue an additional degree. It is important to keep that spark of inquiry and learning alive in order to be the best possible medical-surgical nurses.

REFERENCES

