

CERTIFIED TO CARE!



Understanding The Impact, Benefits, and Barriers in Pursuing Professional Certification Amongst Operating Room Nurses & Surgical Technologist: A Quality Improvement (QI) Project



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Introduction

In the dynamic and high-stakes environment of the operating room (OR), OR Nurses and Surgical Technologists (STs) play critical roles in ensuring safe, efficient, and high-quality surgical care. Their stellar collaboration upholds sterile technique, supports surgical precision, and protects patient safety. These professionals blend technical expertise, sound judgment, and teamwork to achieve excellence in perioperative practice. Professional certification, such as the Certified Perioperative Nurse (CNOR) and Certified Surgical Technologist (CST) credentials, demonstrates advanced knowledge, clinical proficiency, and a strong commitment to excellence.

Background

Although certification is a voluntary process, it represents more than a credential it signifies dedication to lifelong learning, adherence to professional standards, and pride in one's role. Nationally recognized as indicators of expertise, such certifications validate competency and commitment to quality surgical care (National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting [NBSTSA], n.d.). The Certification and Credentialing Institute (n.d.) notes that CNOR certification differentiates nurses in the broader field and supports institutional goals such as Magnet® recognition. Likewise, CST certification confirms a technologist's expertise in anticipating surgical needs and promoting a safe operative environment. These credentials foster improved clinical performance, stronger patient outcomes, and alignment with healthcare organizations' quality-improvement priorities.

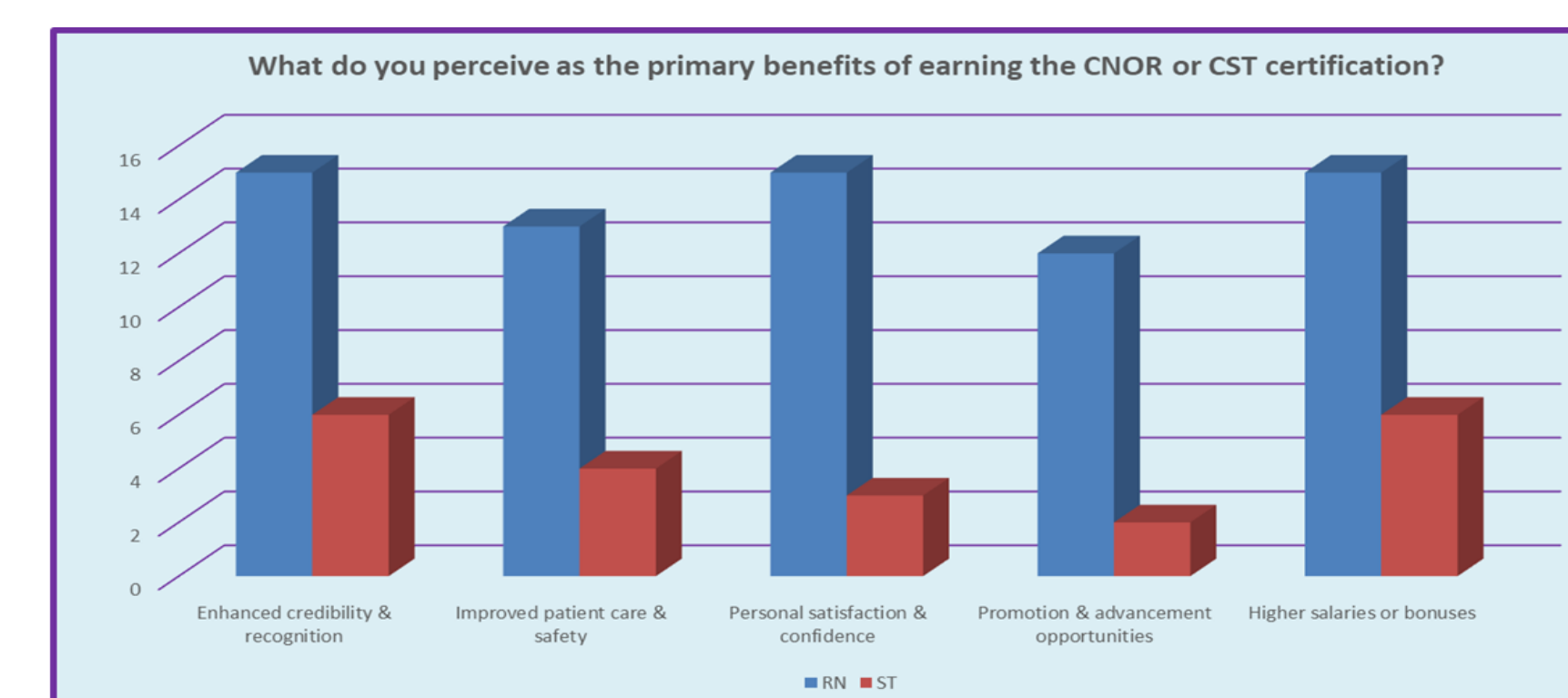
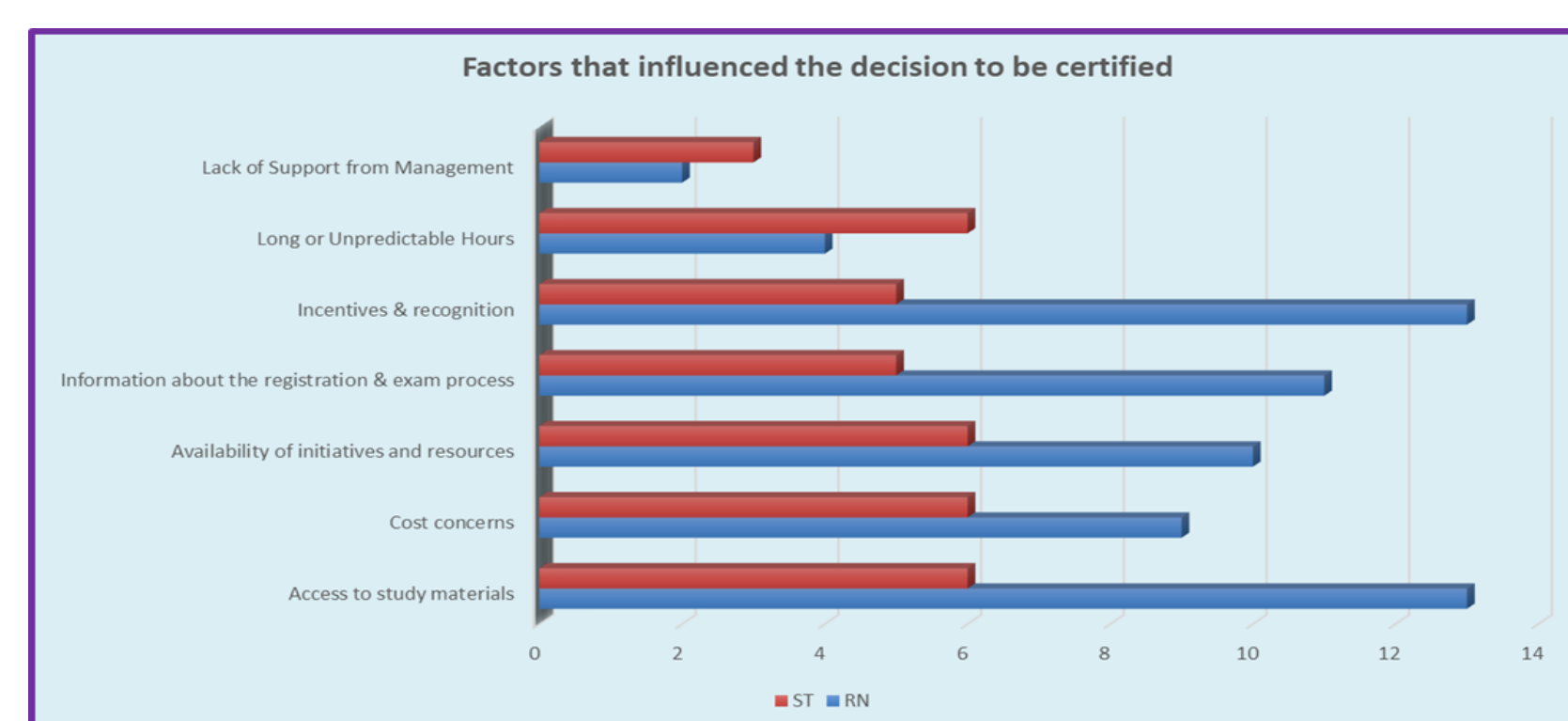
Purpose of the Project

- Study aims to explore personal and institutional barriers faced by OR nurses and STs toward pursuing professional certification by: examining their perceptions, motivations and perceived benefits of professional certification.
- Findings will be used to develop strategies that promote professional certification and increase the number of certified perioperative staff
- Leads to professional excellence in practice and leadership having a huge impact to patient care quality and safety.

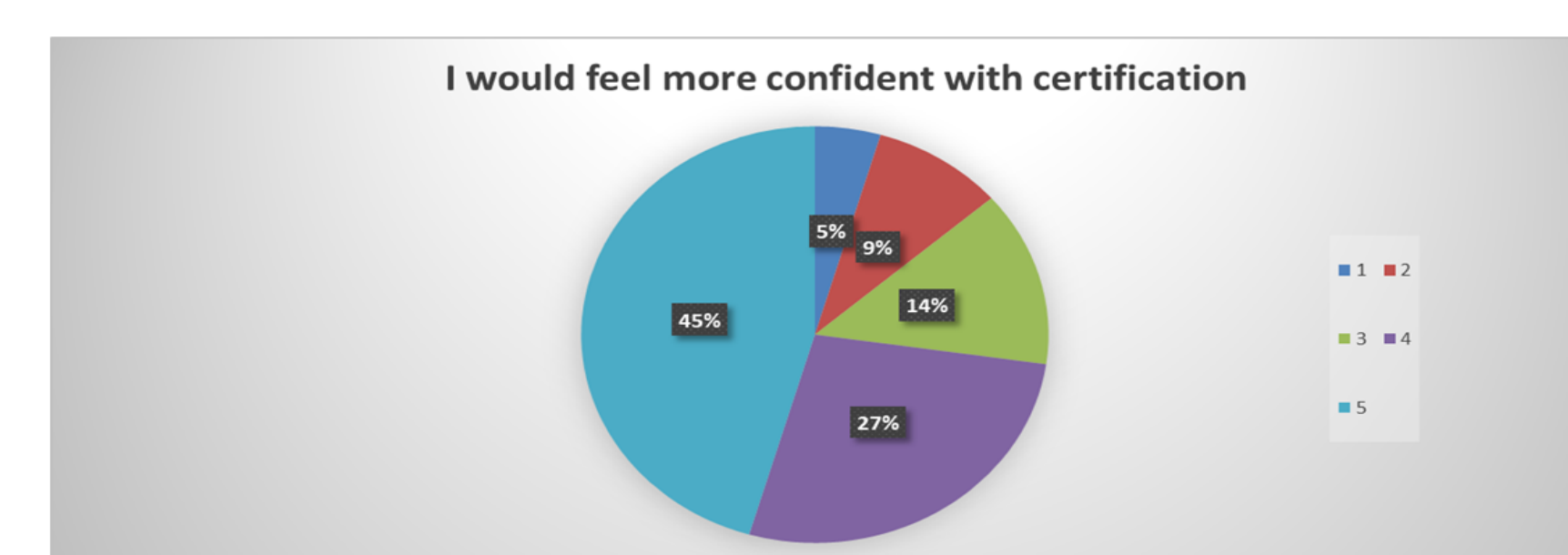
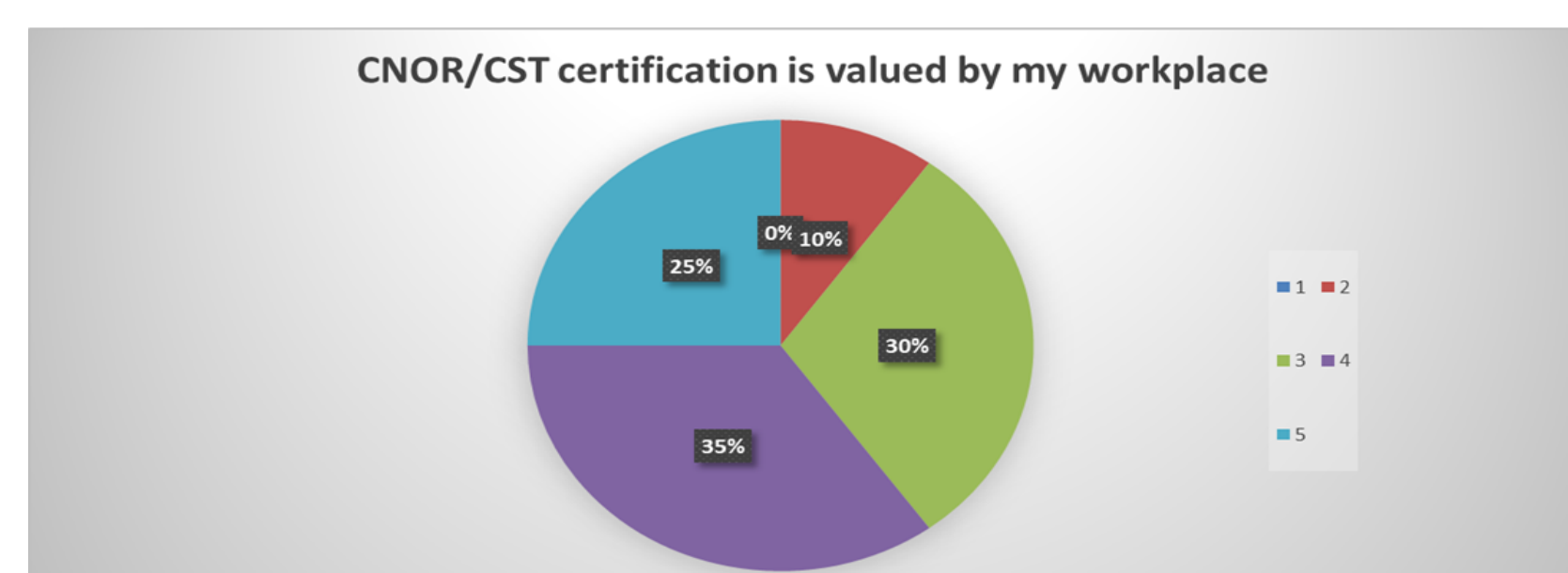
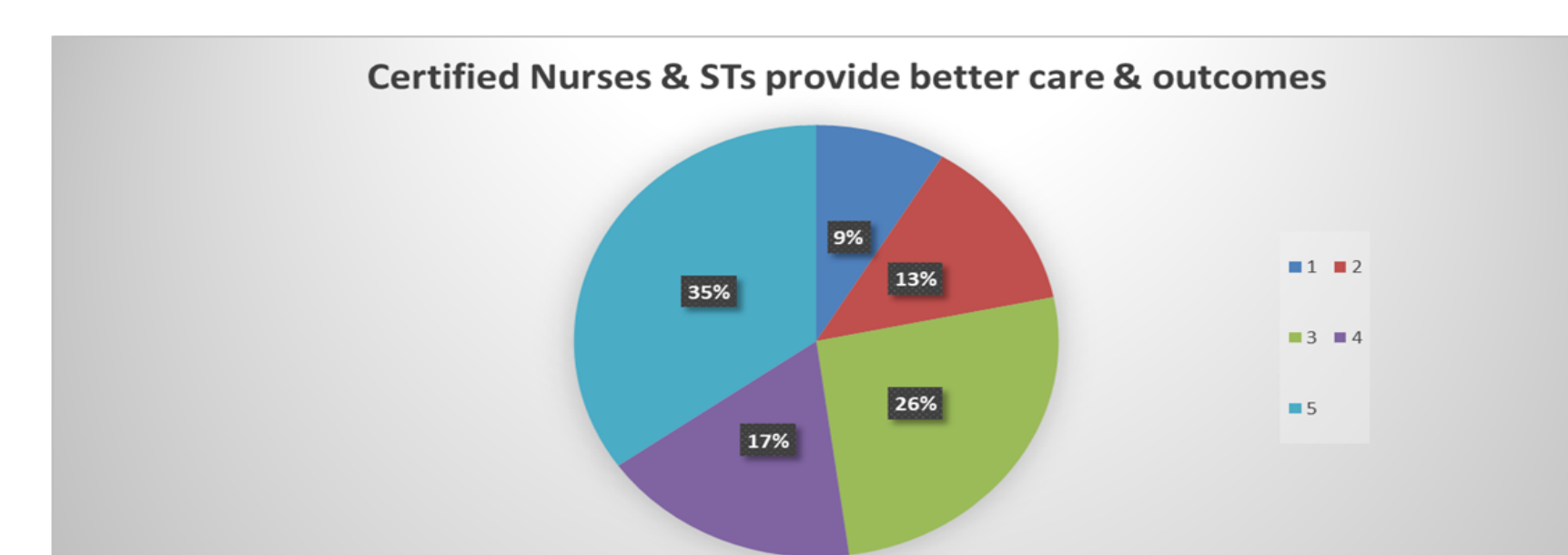
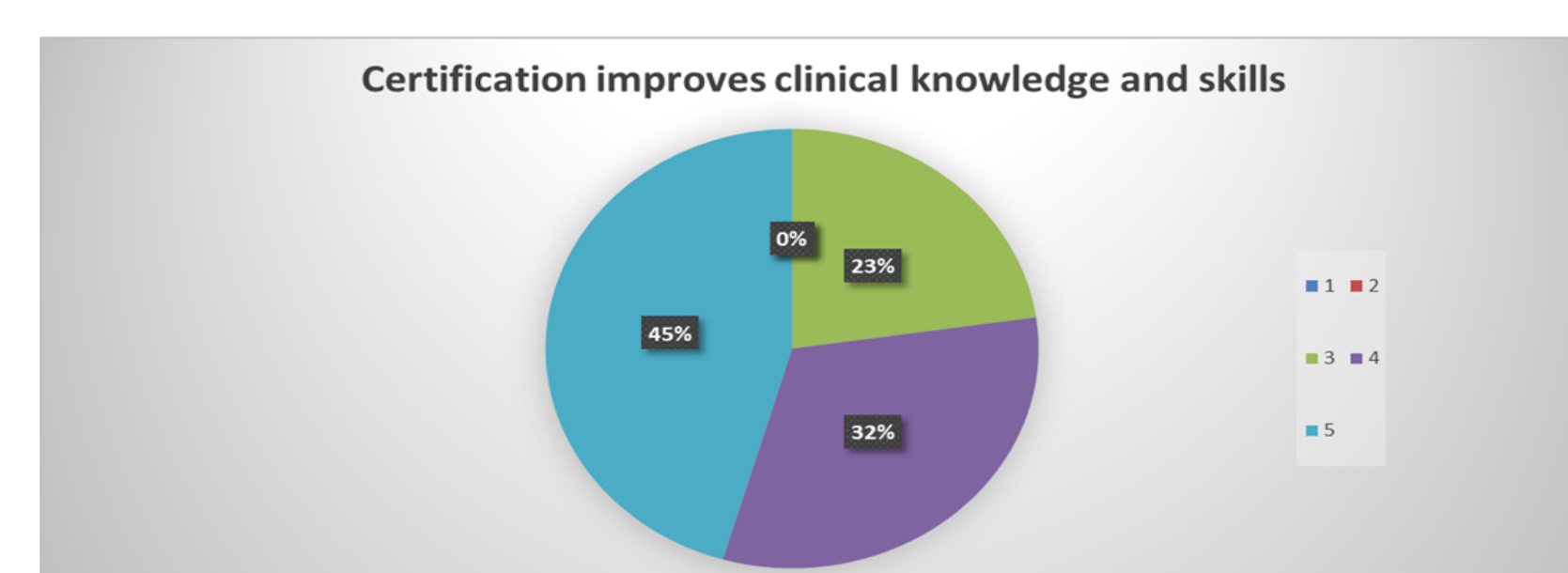
Methodology of Intervention

- The Plan Do Study Act (PDSA) Model guided this QI project
- A mixed-methods questionnaire was developed and distributed to OR nurses and surgical technologists (across ZB3 O.R.) within the coverage of the study.
 - Survey included demographic questions, multiple-choice and Likert scale items addressing factors that influence the decision to be certified, awareness of certification programs, perceived advantages of obtaining CNOR or CST certification, and reasons for not pursuing them. Open-ended questions provided qualitative insights into participant perspectives.

Description of Data Collection and Analysis



Professional & Institutional Impact of CNOR or CST Certification (1= no impact 5 = with significant impact)



Outcome Measures/ Results/Limitations

Study highlighted several key factors influencing staff decisions to pursue certification:

- Access to study materials emerged as the most influential factor across both groups, underscoring the importance of having adequate and accessible educational resources to support exam preparation.
- Cost concerns/Long or unpredictable work hours presented significant barriers, suggesting that financial and time constraints continue to limit certification engagement.
- Availability of institutional initiatives, supportive resources, and clear information about the registration and examination process were also critical, emphasizing the role of organizational communication and infrastructure in promoting certification.

Discussion/Limitations

Despite the challenges, participants strongly agreed that certification positively impacts clinical knowledge, confidence, and the quality of care

- Incentives/recognition were found to be powerful motivators, especially for nursing staff, who viewed certification as a pathway to professional credibility and organizational recognition.
- Sample size was relatively small, especially for Surgical Technologists, which may influence the representativeness of the findings. Most responses came from Operating Room Nurses, and the limited number of ST participants constrains broader conclusions about this group.

Implications for Practice

The CNOR and CST certification benefits of this project should be shared with other OR nurses and Surgical Tech in the hospital system including the following:

- Enhanced professional reputation, improved patient care, increased personal confidence, and opportunities for promotion and professional advancement.
- Addressing cost, workload, and institutional support barriers could effectively increase certification rates, foster professional growth, and strengthen patient care outcomes within the perioperative environment.

Future Research

- Future research should explore the actual participation and achievement of CNOR and CST certifications.
- Conduct a mixed method quantitative and qualitative research study to evaluate a more detailed approach to learning more about the perceived barriers and facilitators in achievement.
- Expanding study to other OR hospital systems.

References

American Nurses Association. (2014, November 12). *ANA Position Statement. Professional Role Competence.* <https://www.nursingworld.org/practice-policy/nursing-excellence/official-position-statements/id/professional-role-competence/>

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The National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting. (n.d.). CST Certification. <https://www.nbstsa.org/cst-certification>

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