



Driving Surgical Excellence: A Multi-System Organization's Path to CNOR Designation



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Background and Clinical Issue

Perioperative nursing is a complex, specialized area, requiring specific knowledge to ensure optimal patient outcomes, safety, and adherence to evidence-based practices.

Specialty certifications exist throughout the nursing profession; however, one specifically speaks to the operating room nurses; the Certified Nurse of the Operating Room (CNOR).

The CNOR credential validates perioperative nurses' expertise and commitment to professional excellence. Obtaining the CNOR credential shows investment in professional growth, reinforcing the values of operating room nursing, and a dedication to improving patient outcomes.

Research demonstrates that specialty-certified nurses contribute significantly to improved patient outcomes. Studies have associated higher certification rates with reductions in hospital-acquired infections, patient falls, and surgical complications, as well as increased use of evidence-based practice among certified nurses.



Clinical Setting and Description of Team

NGHS is a 6-campus hospital system with over 1,026 inpatient beds and 51 operating room suites. Our largest campus, Gainesville, is a Level I trauma center with 28 suites. Our sister campuses consist of Braselton with 7 suites, Barrow with 3 suites, Lumpkin with 4 suites, Habersham with 5 suites, and the ambulatory surgery center with 4 suites. In fiscal year 2025, 32, 231 surgical cases were completed.

The operating room leadership team consists of vice president, executive director, directors, managers, assistant nurse managers, clinical specialty coordinators, and clinical educators.

Preparation and Planning

An assessment of current certification rates was conducted by the Perioperative Professional Development Manager to establish a baseline and identify opportunities for improvement.

Following this evaluation, support was sought from Surgical Services leadership and clinical executives to secure the financial resources and organizational commitment necessary to promote certification.

Clinical Educators then developed and implemented a structured plan to guide and support perioperative nurses through the CNOR certification process, including education and preparation resources. After achieving designation, a formal recognition plan was established to celebrate certified nurses and reinforce the organization's commitment to professional development and surgical excellence.

SWOT Analysis:

- **Strength:** Strong leadership support, specialty educators dedicated to promoting resources and guidance, potential for improved patient outcomes
- **Weakness:** Costs associated with exam preparation materials and exam fees
- **Opportunity:** Improving recruitment and retention by supporting certification, standardizing perioperative knowledge across a multi-system organization
- **Threat:** Budget limitations, eligibility of the staff



Assessment

The Certified Nurse Operating Room (CNOR) certification represents a commitment to excellence in perioperative nursing and underscores a nurse's dedication to safe, high-quality patient care. Earning this credential reflects professional growth, clinical expertise, and a passion for surgical nursing. Historically, awareness of the CNOR certification has been limited across many healthcare organizations. As our organization expanded, we began focusing on improving certification rates across departments. This initiative highlighted an opportunity to increase the number of CNOR-certified nurses within our team and to pursue formal CNOR designation for our department, across multiple campuses.

Implementation

After securing approval for financial and resource support, we initiated an organization-wide communication campaign targeting nursing staff.

Emails were sent to nurses who qualified to sit for the exam, providing information about the importance of CNOR certification and outlining the benefits our organization offers to support this professional development. Additionally, information about the CNOR initiative was consistently shared during daily management huddles and posted on education and announcement boards across all six of our campuses.

We collaborated closely with our system's Clinical Competency Manager and Professional Development Manager to obtain CNOR exam vouchers and establish reimbursement for CNOR prep courses.

This financial support effectively removed cost barriers that might have deterred nurses from pursuing certification.

Department educators played a key role by assisting staff with registration for both the prep courses and the certification exam, in addition to providing comprehensive study materials.



Outcome

The outcome of this initiative includes increased certification rates on all 6 campuses, including our Ambulatory Surgery Center. We have achieved the CNOR Strong designation on 3 of our 6 campuses for 2025 and 4 of our 6 campuses for 2026. This work has not only improved patient care but also increased staff engagement and contributes to the strengthening of the organization's reputation for clinical excellence.

Implications for Perioperative Nursing

Implications for perioperative nursing include higher level of patient care provided to surgical patients across a multi-campus organization, increased staff engagement and morale, leadership development, and professional growth. Increased certification rates did lead to additional financial investments from the organization; however, these costs can be offset by decreased readmission rates and increased patient satisfaction scores due to the impact of nursing practice and the care they provide to the patients.



