

Achieving state compliance and improving employee engagement through specialty certification in intensive care unit nurses

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Specialty nursing certification is helpful in identifying nurses as experts in their field of practice, positive patient outcomes and increased employee engagement. Despite this fact, the number of certified nurses in the majority of units remains low. Some states have established minimum requirements regarding staff certification for certain specialized care departments.

At the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) Mercy Hospital Intensive Care Unit (ICU), in addition to ensuring that half of all staff nurses are specialty certified, unit leaders were interested in understanding why some nurses were more apt to attempt certification than others. Surveying staff demonstrated that unit nurses were mainly concerned about preparatory materials, study time, and costs associated with the exam.

In an attempt to resolve these issues, unit management and frontline nurses worked together to develop simple, yet effective interventions. Weekly and monthly staff updates were used to communicate current unit certification rates. Study materials were provided to interested staff members through information sharing programs and the utilization of items developed within the unit. Finally, hospital management included application fee reimbursement for exam candidates who were successful.

Since the beginning of the project in late 2012, the ICU has seen interest in applying for specialty certification exams increase by almost 300% and successful certification rates more than double. All members of the unit charge nurse and shared governance teams have opted to prepare for the exam as a group. In addition, staff nurses are acknowledged for successful completion of the exam through unit-based recognition efforts.

Biography

Jason Mittenzwey, RN, BSN is a Professional Staff Nurse in the Medical Intensive Care Unit (MICU) at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC) Mercy Hospital. He has worked as an ICU staff nurse and charge nurse for the last four years and is both a CPR and ACLS instructor. In addition, he is also a Council Coordinator for the MICU Practice Council and serves as the Chair of the Hospital-wide Night Council.

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