



Orthopaedic Nurses Certification Board
Recognizing Excellence • Improving Care



A White Paper: **Perceived Value of Certification for Nurses and Nurse Managers**

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Since the first RNs earned orthopaedic certification in 1988, over 12,000 nurses have proudly held the ONC credential. Today, nearly 7000 orthopaedic-certified nurses, nurse practitioners, and clinical nurse specialists demonstrate excellence in the care of persons with musculoskeletal health concerns.

Why did they choose certification? A representative sample of over 300 orthopaedic-certified nurses responded to a survey from the Orthopaedic Nurses Certification Board (ONCB) to confirm why they value their credentials and maintain specialty certification.

Their answers offer compelling reasons for nurses to get, and keep, orthopaedic nursing certification.

Value for the Nurse

Attaining orthopaedic nursing certification has historically and anecdotally been identified by individual nurses as a great source of personal pride. Their answers on the Perceived Value of Certification Tool® help us identify the specific reasons certified nurses prize their credentials.

- Enhances feeling of personal accomplishment.
- Enhances personal confidence in clinical abilities.

Because change in health care is a constant reality, nurses need to be prepared to contribute to and provide the highest level of care. Nurses responded to survey questions about the value of certification on a personal level, specifically indicating how orthopaedic nursing certification enhances their feelings of personal accomplishment and personal confidence in clinical abilities. From the group of over 300 survey respondents, 98% *strongly agreed* or *agreed* certification enhances feelings of personal accomplishment. Additionally, 95% *strongly agreed* or *agreed* orthopaedic nursing certification enhances their personal confidence in clinical abilities.

Professional growth is seen by many in nursing as a personal responsibility. Nurses must prioritize continuous professional development (Hunt, 2018). Achieving certification is an investment in self; studying and preparing for the certification examination offers the opportunity to increase professional knowledge.

“Becoming ONC definitely was a personal accomplishment. It gives acknowledgement for your hard work, knowledge, and for the time devoted to prepare, obtain and maintain certification.

– Bernice Robertson, RN, ONC

Clinical ladders offer nurses in many hospitals and health systems a path to professional advancement. Attaining and maintaining a specialty nursing certification credential, such as ONC®, ONP-C®, or ONC-A™, may be built into the clinical ladder structure for healthcare employers. Certification has been cited by many nurses as a path to enhanced professional credibility and feelings of personal accomplishment.

I’m very happy about my ONC, I feel that it is a great accomplishment. Patients ask me about my ‘certified’ tag on my ID badge, and I tell them that being certified means that I studied and passed an exam about orthopaedics.

– Cherry Ann Novales, RN, ONC

- Provides personal satisfaction.
- Provides professional challenge.

Since the launch of the ONC credential more than 30 years ago, many nurses have provided insights into the intrinsic value they receive from orthopaedic nursing certification. On the ONCB survey, more than 98% indicated they *strongly agree* or *agree* that certification provides personal satisfaction. More than 96% of respondents also indicated they *strongly agree* or *agree* that certification provides professional challenge.

Although achievement of certification represents the first challenge, the certified nurse embraces continued challenges by serving as a professional role model and valuable resource for colleagues. Certification maintenance through continued recertification reflects a commitment to lifelong learning that further contributes to increased confidence and personal satisfaction.

Certification has enabled me to keep current in trends in orthopaedics. Setting learning goals before each certification cycle has provided valuable reflection on what I believe I need to expand my knowledge and seek learning opportunities. Maintaining certification has kept me involved and connected to NAON, which has helped solidify my national network of orthopaedic nurses and friends.

– Amber Kujath, PhD, RN, ONC

- Indicates professional growth.

Almost 300 nurses (97.3%) who completed the survey indicated they *strongly agree* or *agree* that certification indicates professional growth. Attainment of certification represents a self-fulfilling prophecy of professional accomplishment as nurses continue to excel in their practice. Professional growth requires a commitment to life-long learning, including continuing education and self-study, networking with professional colleagues, self-study, professional reading, achieving specialty certification and seeking advanced degrees (American Nurses Association, 2015). Nurses who pursue specialty certification in orthopaedics epitomize a dedication to professional growth.

“ I obtained my certification in 1991. It was a catalyst to lifelong learning and professional growth in orthopaedic nursing.

– Charla Johnson, DNP, RN, ONC

- Enhances professional autonomy.

In the ONCB survey, 89% of respondents indicated they *strongly agree* or *agree* that certification enhances their professional autonomy. This was true not just for advanced practice nurses, many of whom may already have autonomous practice authority, but also for registered nurses working in a wide range of practice settings. Autonomy does not refer only to unsupervised or independent practice; autonomy also can be realized as confidence to make decisions in practice. Reich, Smith, and Guidice (2016) found “[certified] nurses outperformed the Magnet benchmark in all 11 domains, indicating that professional nurses felt supported and autonomous in their practice” (p. 338). Certified orthopaedic nurses gain autonomy through experience, dedication, and a penchant for lifelong learning.

- Provides evidence of accountability.

In addition to enhanced autonomy, orthopaedic nursing certification increases a sense of accountability in credential holders. Nearly 95% of survey respondents answered they *strongly agree* or *agree* that certification provides evidence of accountability in their knowledge and practice. The American Nurses Association (as cited in Zittel et al., 2016) has identified accountability as essential for educational progression and lifelong learning, both of which are key components in nursing scope and standards of practice. Orthopaedic nursing certification helps nurses attain and maintain these important elements of nursing practice.

- Provides evidence of professional commitment.

Over 98% of nurses who responded to the ONCB survey indicated they *strongly agree* or *agree* that certification provides evidence of professional commitment. This finding is consistent with results over time from other nursing certification bodies. For example, a 2004 study by the Certification Board Perioperative Nursing (now Competency and Credentialing Institute) found 92% of certified nurses believe their credentials represented evidence of professional commitment (Byrne et al., 2004). Participating in a 2005 study by the American Board of Nursing Specialties, the Pediatric Nursing Certification Board (n.d.) found 98% of their 470 respondents believe certification provides evidence of professional commitment. Finally, the Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board replicated earlier research and found 97.7% of certified nurse respondents agreed certification represents evidence of professional commitment (Haskins et al., 2011).

Many healthcare employers, including those that have pursued Magnet™ designation for their nursing services, also recognize the professional commitment exemplified by certified nurses. The majority of nurses participating in ONCB’s incentive program Retest for Success have their certification fees paid by their employers in recognition of the unique value and commitment of certified nurses to their roles (Personal communication, D. Roberts, January 16, 2020).

Eligibility requirements from any certifying body typically specify a number of worked hours or years as a registered nurse in the specialty. Examination candidates or employers pay for the testing opportunity, and candidates also must dedicate time to prepare for the test. These actions represent substantial professional commitment. Examinees may not be required to have specialty nursing certification, so their voluntary action is even more commendable.

- Increases marketability.

Nurses who achieve certification historically report their credentials make them more attractive to employers, patients and clients. Leaders at a midwestern community hospital surveyed facility nurses to ascertain their awareness of specialty nursing certification, identify any barriers to their becoming certified, and determine their perceived value of certification (Garrison et al., 2018). Authors noted, “Extrinsically, certified nurses rated increased marketability and employer recognition as the greatest benefits of certification at 95.1%” (p. 45). This position is consistent with responses to the ONCB survey, on which more than 90% of nurses indicated they *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that certification increases marketability.

See “Manager Survey” for additional insights from nurse managers on the question of marketability.

The National Association of Orthopaedic Nursing has solidified its stance regarding orthopaedic nursing certification through a recently revised position statement. In the release of the position statement, Satusky (2019) noted, “Certified nurses enjoy enhanced professional credibility, increased job satisfaction and marketability” (p. 301). As part of the competency assessment in its disease-specific program, The Joint Commission (2020) also recognized the importance of certification. Part of the site visit includes a facilitated review of “relevant education, experience and training or certification” (p. 29). Because of this, many healthcare administrators actively chose to include the use of certified nurses who are experts in their field as part of their marketing endeavors.

An increasing number of recertifying orthopaedic nurses have indicated in their communication to ONCB the need for immediate proof of their maintenance of certification for their employers (Personal communication, D. Roberts, February 7, 2020). More facility leaders now recognize the value of specialty nursing certification and often link it to continued employment in identified roles, receipt of a bonus, or consideration for promotion.

“My certification has opened so many doors for me, primarily giving me an advantage when applying for jobs. Everyone wants a certified nurse on their staff!

– Maureen Wedepohl, BSN, RN, ONC

- Increases salary.

Along with marketability, salary may be an extrinsic motivator for nurses to certify and maintain certification. Results on the ONCB survey were less positive on this question, with only 43% of respondents indicating they *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that certification contributes to increased salary. Anecdotally, however, certified nurses have described a trend that includes increased salary or hourly differentials related to their certification. Bonuses also could be offered in the form of a one-time payment for earning certification or an annual bonus for continuing to maintain certification. Certified nurses also may be able to negotiate increased pay with a prospective employer. Based on a 2018 survey, their base salaries often are greater than non-certified nurses (Nurse.com, 2018). Specifically, certified respondents identified a mean salary of \$81,672 for men (n=137) and \$80,420 for women (n=1632). Non-certified respondents reported a mean salary of \$78,342 for men (n=255) and \$68,227 for women (n=2475).

DC had just begun a program in which clinical nurse specialists could apply for APRN licenses. The OCNS-C certification helped me obtain this license. I was then able to get a 5% raise and a new position within my organization.

– Amy Harris, MSN, RN, OCNS-C

Figure 1

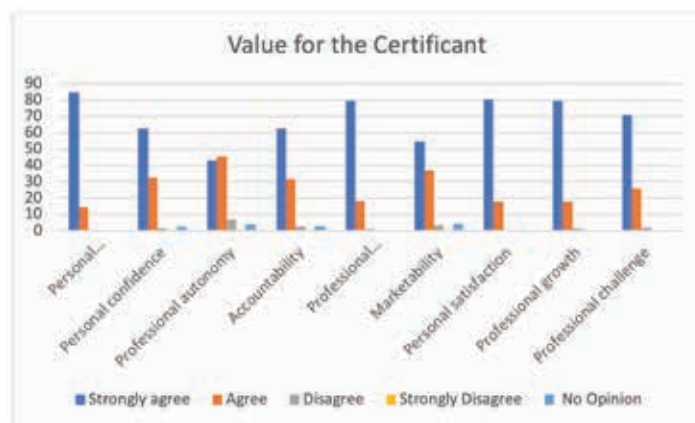


Figure 2



Value for Employers and the Public

Specialty nursing certification programs such as ONCB’s ONC and ONP-C promote the highest standards of nursing practice for optimal patient care. Passing the ONC or ONP-C exam ensures nurses have specialty knowledge to care for persons with musculoskeletal health conditions. This specialty nursing expertise is beneficial to healthcare patients and employers.

- Validates specialized knowledge.

Of 307 nurses who responded to this item on the ONCB survey, 99% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that certification validates specialized knowledge. These results are consistent with the findings of other specialty nursing certification bodies. In an early survey using the PVCT, 95.2% of certified nurses through the Certification Board Perioperative Nursing (now Competency and Credentialing Institute) indicated certification validates specialized knowledge (Bryne et al., 2004). In addition, 99.1% of nurses surveyed by the Pediatric Nursing Certification Board (n.d.) and 99.8% of nurses surveyed by the Medical-Surgical Nursing Certification Board (Haskins et al., 2011) indicated certification validates specialized knowledge.

Certification programs such as those maintained by ONCB help to promote the highest standards of nursing practice for optimal patient care. Passing the ONC or ONP-C examination ensures the nurse has knowledge in the specialty practice of orthopaedic nursing.



Certification has served as both a personal and professional validation of my orthopaedic knowledge and skill. At our organization, certification has helped to establish and improve use of evidence-based practice and identifies the staff as leaders in these patient efforts.

– Liana G. Chotikul, MSN, CRNP, CNOR, ONC

- Indicates level of clinical competence.

Competency assessment is dynamic and reflects new research in the field, new equipment, and changes in practice or procedures (Wright, 2015). Nurses who choose to pursue certification not only spend time studying for an examination, but also devote themselves to continued education for maintenance of certification to ensure their practice knowledge remains current. In some states, certification by a national crediting body is one way to demonstrate competence when renewing a nursing license. Of more than 300 respondents to the ONCB survey, 97% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that certification indicates a level of clinical competence.

The Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC, 2019) defined continuing competence as “the ongoing ability to integrate and apply the knowledge, skills, judgment, and values to practice safely, effectively, and ethically in a designated role” (Standard 13, Rationale). This is reflected not only in attainment of certification, but also in

maintenance of certification. Recertifying nurses continue to meet requirements related to professional practice hours and continuing education as ways to demonstrate their ongoing competence.

- Indicates attainment of a practice standard.

The American Board of Nursing Specialties (n.d.) has declared, “Specialty nursing certification is THE standard by which the public recognizes quality nursing care” (“Vision”). The value placed on certification as a mark of excellence was reflected in responses to the ONCB survey. Over 96% of nurses indicated they *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that certification indicates attainment of a practice standard. The American Nurses Credentialing Center (“Why Certify?”, 2010) also noted certification assures consumers that nursing professionals have met standards of practice, and are able to meet the needs of healthcare employers and the public.

- Enhances professional credibility.

A remarkable 98% of nurses responding to the ONCB survey indicated they *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that certification enhances professional credibility. Maintenance of certification validates credential holders’ expertise and enables them to maintain an innovative edge in their practice. Earning specialty nursing certification can boost confidence and allow nurses to present themselves with even more confidence in what they can bring to a care setting. The American Association of Nurse Assessment Coordination (2018) noted nurses continue to be rated #1 in honesty and ethical standards on annual Gallup polls, but employers still need evidence of their ability to perform as qualified professionals. Having specialty certification increases the credibility of nurses who have gone beyond basic education to gain advanced knowledge so they can provide high-quality care.

The leader of our special unit was so enthusiastic, motivating and encouraging our unit to become 100% ONCs. The benefits for our patients were immeasurable...the most knowledgeable team of orthopaedic nurses caring for orthopaedic patients. The credential has given me self-confidence when interfacing with patients and their families.

– Diane Jeselskis, BSN, RN, ONC

- Promotes recognition from peers.

A marked majority of over 92% of respondents to the ONCB survey indicated they *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that certification promotes peer recognition. Certified nurses are respected as experts, and become mentors for their co-workers. Certified nurses also can assist other nurses on their journey to become certified.

“Becoming certified helped me to be more confident in my profession. I am very passionate about continuing my education and keeping my education up, and to help my co-workers to become certified. I loved being an orthopaedic-certified nurse!
– Jody Percy, RN, ONC

- Promotes recognition from other health care professionals.

Over 91% of nurses who responded to the ONCB survey *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that certification promotes recognition from other healthcare professionals. This is done in part through enhanced collaboration with interprofessional team members in the healthcare setting. Certified nurses are seen as having increased collaboration with the healthcare team and improved nurse-physician communication. Certification, which is well understood by medical colleagues, contributes to the recognition of nurses' practice expertise.

“As one of the first orthopaedic-certified nurses, I have even had doctors come to me for information. Thank you, ONCB!
– Linda Altizer, MSN, RN, ONC

- Promotes recognition from employers.

More than 86% of respondents to the ONCB survey indicated they *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that certification promotes recognition from employers. Anecdotally, certified nurses have reported employer recognition through financial rewards, banners, bulletin board postings, hospital newsletters, personal notes from the chief nursing office, and wall plaques. A frequent recognition strategy among healthcare facilities is establishment of a “Wall of Honor” for display of certified nurses' photographs or certificates. In addition, certification is often included in clinical ladders to allow nurses an additional benefit. These efforts honor

certified nurses' dedication, expertise, and dedication to continuing competence.

I obtained my orthopaedic certification because my unit supported me in this endeavor. This certification has ensured I am actively continuing my education, staying abreast of the newest practice trends, and expanding my knowledge in areas I don't commonly encounter. I wear my ONC pin on my badge with pride, like the Navy Seals wear their trident.
– Aimee Reyes, BSN, RN, ONC

- Increases consumer confidence.

The Institute of Medicine (2011) has affirmed the need for specialty nursing certification as a mechanism to assure the public of nurses' ability to provide safe, quality care. More than 85% of respondents to the ONCB survey indicated they *strongly agreed* or *agreed* that certification increases consumer confidence in their health care. In a landmark Harris poll commissioned by the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, the knowledge of a regionally representative sample of healthcare consumers was assessed (Harris Interactive, Inc., 2002). More than 75% of respondents were aware nurses can become certified. Almost an equal number (73%) indicated they are more likely to choose a hospital with a high percentage of specialty-certified nurses. This response reflects high confidence in the care consumers would receive from certified nurses in facilities where leaders value the expertise reflected in specialty nursing certification.

One of my role responsibilities is teaching patients and their families before surgery. My badge buddy indicates I am certified, which often prompts immediate questions about what that means. Patients are reassured when I explain what my ONC means and why my organizational leaders want their nurses certified. I think it makes that all-important good first impression and sets the stage for a positive care experience.
– Pauline B. Elliott, RN, ONC

Figure 3

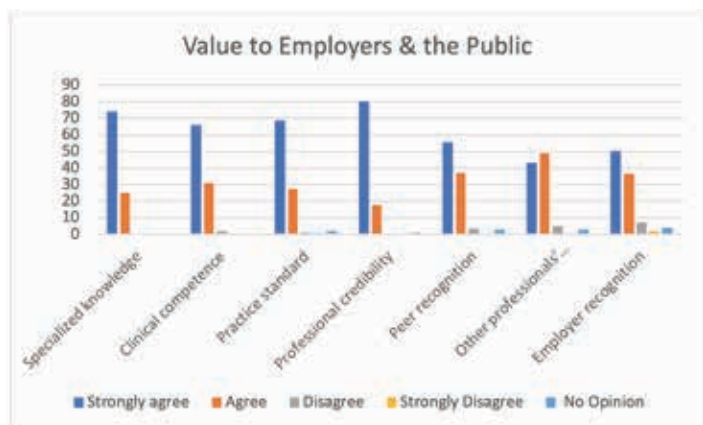
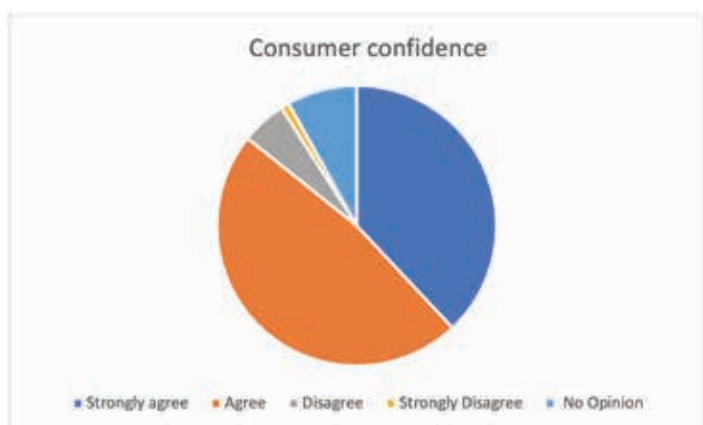


Figure 4



Manager Survey

The American Board of Nursing Specialties surveyed a convenience sample of 139 attendees at a nursing management conference in 2002 (Stromborg et al., 2005). ONCB replicated this survey in September 2019 to determine if nurse managers' perceptions of specialty nursing certification had changed in the intervening 17 years. For the ONCB survey, *nurse manager* was operationally defined as one who "oversees patient care, makes management and budgetary decisions, sets work schedules, coordinates meetings and makes personnel decisions (e.g., hiring)." A convenience sample of potential nurse managers in the data base of the National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses received the survey, with 82 responding.

Unlike the original research, a 5-point Likert scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 5=*strongly agree*) was used in the ONCB survey to allow respondents to indicate their level of agreement with 20 statements starting with "A certified nurse..." (see Table 1).

Despite the small sample for this recent survey, findings strongly reflected the results on the original 2002 survey (Stromborg et al., 2005). Highlighted areas on Table 1 indicate questions for which ABNS responses exceeded 40% agreement. For example, the items on the ONCB survey with the highest average score ("Has a proven knowledge base in a given specialty;" "Has documented experience in a given specialty") were also among top scorers on the ABNS survey; 75.5% of ABNS respondents indicated agreement with the first statement, and 54.7% with the second. Another question with a high level of agreement on the ABNS survey (67.6%, "Demonstrates a greater professional commitment to lifelong learning") had an average score of 4.6 on the ONCB survey. Only one question ("Has greater job retention") had less than 20% agreement with the ABNS survey. That item has an average score of 4.4 on the ONCB survey, perhaps suggesting a perception of improvement in this area on the part of nurse managers.

Very importantly, both surveys requested response to the following: "Assuming all other qualifications were equal, I would prefer to hire a certified nurse." On the ABNS survey (Stromborg et al., 2005), 85% of respondents indicated they would hire a certified nurse if all other qualifications were equal. On the ONCB survey, the average score for this statement was 4.5, indicating a high level of agreement.

Responses to the ONCB survey confirmed nurse managers clearly value specialty certification by their registered nurse staff. Certification does play a part in hiring. While research continues on the benefits of nursing certification, managers' perceptions of the value and impact of certification are highly relevant.

Summary

ONCB surveyed orthopaedic nurses and nurse managers to determine the value they place on specialty nursing certification. Almost 400 responded to the surveys as a representative sample. Intrinsic characteristics typically were valued highly. For example, more than 98% of respondents indicated they *strongly agree* or *agree* that certification provides personal satisfaction. A similar percentage indicated they *strongly agreed* or *agreed* certification provides evidence of professional commitment. In addition, 99% *agreed* or *strongly agreed* certification validates specialized knowledge.

Extrinsic value was experienced less frequently by survey respondents. For example, slightly more than 86% of survey respondents indicated they *strongly agreed* or *agreed* certification promotes recognition from employers. Only 43% of respondents indicated they *strongly agreed* or *agreed* certification contributes to increased salary. Similarly, some 90% of nurses indicated they *strongly*

Table 1

Survey Statement A certified nurse...	Mean score (1-5 scale)	ABNS Survey Results* (% agreement with statement)
Has a proven knowledge base in a given specialty.	4.8	75.5
Has documented experience in a given specialty.	4.8	54.7
Has greater job retention.	4.4	17.3
Demonstrates a greater professional commitment to lifelong learning.	4.6	67.6
Positively impacts patient outcomes.	4.7	43.2
Contributes better to the overall quality of patient care delivery.	4.6	38.8
Is able to detect and initiate early interventions for patient complications.	4.7	32.4
Commits less errors in practice.	4.2	16.5
Has fewer adverse incidents.	4.2	12.9
Has fewer disciplinary actions.	4.1	20.1
Is more likely to volunteer to serve on unit and/or hospital-wide committees.	4.2	34.5
Serves as an informal and formal leader within the unit.	4.6	46.8
Practices with greater autonomy.	4.5	41.7
Is more accountable for his or her actions.	4.5	32.4
Collaborates more effectively with physicians and other members of the healthcare team.	4.4	23.7
Is more likely to initiate collaboration with physicians and other members of the healthcare team.	4.4	25.2
Is a more satisfied employee.	4.2	20.9
Demonstrates increased confidence.	4.6	48.2
Is a role model and mentor for others.	4.7	51.8
Is a better preceptor.	4.5	36.7

*Stromborg et al., 2005

agreed or *agreed* certification increases marketability.

Certified nurses clearly value their credentials as part of their professional development. Nurse managers indicated certification does play a part in their hiring practices, reflecting their perception over time of certified nurses as valued members of the healthcare team. Anecdotal reports of practice changes, including financial assistance with maintenance of certification as well as provision of a bonus or differential, suggest healthcare leaders' growing desire to recognize and reward practice excellence through specialty nursing certification.

About the Perceived Value of Certification Tool®

ONCB used the PVCT as its survey tool. This tool is a nurse-reported rating of how certification benefits nurses. The instrument has a 2-factor structure consisting of *intrinsic* and *extrinsic* value subscales based on both exploratory (Gaberson et al., 2003; Sechrist et al., 2006) and confirmatory factor analysis (Sechrist et al., 2006). Reliability of the PVCT is demonstrated by a stable factor structure across samples of certified nurses, non-certified nurses, and administrators (Sechrist et al., 2006). The PVCT can also be evaluated as a total score with high internal consistency reliability, Cronbach's alpha = 0.92-0.94. In studies with diverse groups of nurses, the PVCT has demonstrated both discriminant and predictive validity (Bekemeier, 2007; Ward et al., 2019).



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