

What Is the Difference Between a Certificate, Certification, and CNE?

In early 2014, the ONS Chemotherapy and Biotherapy Course will transition to an **assessment-based certificate program**. This type of training is a relatively short, non-degree granting program that provides instruction and training around a narrow set of knowledge, skills and competencies associated with completion of a process, provision of a service or fulfillment of continuing education requirements. Credentials are not generally awarded for completion of a certificate program, but certificates indicating attainment of knowledge or added qualifications may be awarded to learners who complete all program requirements. A variety of criteria for successful completing of a program may be required, including the attainment of a passing score on an end-of-program assessment (test) derived from the course objectives. Although assessment is an integral part of the certificate program, the primary purpose is to provide instruction and training. Certificate programs generally are not required for regulatory purposes and do not have a significant impact on hiring, promotion, and other key employment outcomes.

Certification is a voluntary process administered by a nongovernmental entity in which individuals are assessed against predetermined standards for knowledge, skills, and competencies and granted a time-limited credential. Because of their broad nature, certification programs are not tied to a specific course of study or an educational course, curriculum, or provider. The primary focus of certification is on the assessment. Certification indicates mastery of the knowledge and skills required to competently perform in a profession or occupation. Certification may be required for regulatory purposes or may have a significant impact on hiring, promotion, and other employment decisions. Examples include all of the ONCC certifications: OCN[®], CPON[®], CPHON[®], CBCN[®], AOCN[®], AOCNS[®], and AOCNP[®].

A **certificate of attendance or participation** may be issued to indicate attendance at a continuing education program, such as the current ONS Chemotherapy and Biotherapy Course. Although a post-test may be administered at the end of a continuing education activity to verify that the learner participated in the entire program, the purpose of the CNE certificate is to document attendance rather than the attainment of specific knowledge or skills.

Although each of these programs serves an important purpose, it is important to know the differences in the intent of each and what completion of the program will mean for the individual. Nurses, employers, and others who may invest in certification, certificate programs, or CNE should be wise consumers and understand the implications of the programs in which they invest. Specific standards have been established for each type of program and accreditation indicates that the program has met established standards. All three types of programs have an important role to play in the professional development of nurses. Consumers should be sure that the providers of the programs are not misrepresenting them. Nurses also should be sure to represent themselves appropriately upon completion of a program.

