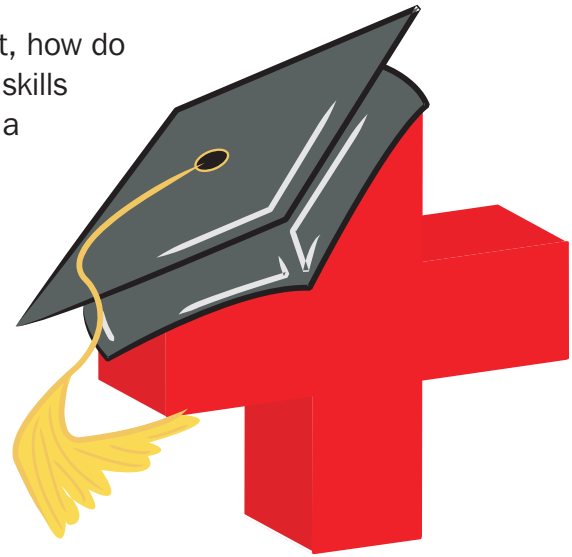


# Let's See Your Credentials

**W**HEN YOU SEE a dentist or a physical therapist, how do you know he or she has the education and skills to properly care for you? How do employers know a nurse is qualified for the job? Health care professionals may seek credentials (e.g., a license or certification) to prove they are competent. In this unit, you will learn more about the different types of credentials available to health care workers as well as how they are obtained and maintained.



## Objectives:



1. Explain the importance and types of “credentialing.”
2. Describe the role of continuing education for health care workers.

## Key Terms:



accredited  
certification  
competence

continuing education  
units  
credentialing  
licensure

national  
reciprocity  
registration  
registry

## Credentialing

**Credentialing** is a formal way of identifying and recognizing individuals who have reached a certain level of **competence** (proficiency) in a particular subject or area. Credentialing helps identify health care workers who have met certain standards. It helps ensure that health care workers are accountable for their work. It also protects patients and consumers by ensuring that health care workers have attained a certain level of education and have demonstrated the skills required to perform their jobs.

## TYPES OF CREDENTIALING

The three main types of credentialing are certification, registration, and licensure.

### Certification

**Certification** is a credential that recognizes and certifies that a person has fulfilled certain requirements for education and the performance of specific skills. It usually involves an assessment of some sort and an evaluation of education and/or work experience. Certification is usually a voluntary process sponsored by a non-governmental agency, association, or organization. The organization or agency is often **national**, operating throughout the United States, as opposed to being in only one state. Occasionally, however, state agencies will issue certificates to individuals who have completed education and training at an approved training center. Technical schools, colleges, and universities also may offer certificate programs.

If someone is “certified,” the individual has met the standards established by the professional organization that oversees that particular career. Certification is usually voluntary, so an individual does not necessarily need to be certified to practice a profession. Dental assistants, laboratory technicians, medical assistants, and nursing assistants are all positions that may be certified.

The certificate program should be accredited by a reputable expert organization. If the program is **accredited**, the school has had its certificate program approved by experts in the industry. A school offers the training. Then when the student completes the program, he or she is eligible to take the certification exam, which is offered by an independent organization recognized as an expert in the field. For example, a student enrolls in a Nuclear Medicine Technology certificate program at a community college, which is accredited by the Joint Review Committee on Educational Programs in Nuclear Medicine in association with the Society of Nuclear Medicine, the American Medical Association, the American College of Radiology, and the American Society of Radiologic Technologists. Program graduates are allowed to sit for two national certification exams: the American Registry of Radiologic Tech-



## FURTHER EXPLORATION...

### ONLINE CONNECTION: Looking Up Licenses

The state of Illinois Web site keeps a database of licensed professionals in a number of careers. The site provides a search feature, so the public can look up health care providers and receive information about how long they have been licensed and if they have ever been disciplined.

Visit the following Web site to look up license information on some health care professionals. You can use the name of your own doctor or find the names of health care providers in the phone book:

<https://www.idfpr.com/DPR/licenselookup/default.asp>

nologists and the Nuclear Medicine Technologist Certification Board. If the individual passes the exams, he or she will be a Certified Nuclear Medicine Technologist.

## Registration

**Registration** is a formal way of gathering and maintaining a **registry**, which is an official record of all the individuals who have met the qualifications for an occupation. The registry is maintained by the regulating agencies that administer the tests for people entering a particular profession. Although registration is not required in all health occupations, registered positions include registered nurses, registered respiratory therapists, registered animal technicians, and registered dietitians.



**FIGURE 1.** Nurses must be registered and licensed by the state to legally practice and use the title “R.N.”

## Licensure

**Licensure** is the process of a governmental agency, usually the state, authorizing an individual to work in a given occupation. Only licensed individuals who have met the educational requirements are permitted to practice the occupation or use the job title. For instance, registered nurses must also be licensed. The State of Illinois Department of Professional Regulation issues licenses to practice to qualified registered nurses. A registered nurse who has not obtained a license cannot practice or use the title “RN.” Other license occupations in Illinois include physicians, dentists, physical therapists, and emergency medical technicians.

The health science technology occupations that require a license vary from state to state. The requirements and procedures for obtaining a license may vary as well. In most cases, an individual must complete an approved educational program, pass a state board exam, and maintain certain standards. Some states require that an individual show proof of continuing education to renew his or her license.

Because licensing requirements vary from state to state, it may not be easy for a health care worker licensed in one state to obtain a license to work in another state. The individual should check with the Department of Professional Regulation to see if there is a **reciprocity** (a deal between two states to recognize and honor the licenses from each other’s state) agreement. If there is no reciprocity agreement, the individual may have to participate in a class or training program and take another board exam to obtain a license from that state.

## Continuing Education

Some states require that certain health science technology professionals show proof of continuing education to maintain or renew a license to practice. For example, many states require registered nurses to obtain 24 to 48 hours of continuing education units (CEUs) every one to two years to renew their licenses. **Continuing education units** are a measure of required participation in a training or education program. The occupations required to do this vary from state to state, as do the number of CEUs required. In addition, some certifying organizations require continuing education for an individual to maintain certification.

### PURPOSE

The purpose of continuing education requirements is to promote professional accountability. It protects the patient by helping to ensure that health practitioners know current medical practices and treatments. It also encourages continued growth and development in the field.

### FORMS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION

There are many forms of continuing education. For instance, health care workers can enroll in a college class, attend a workshop, participate in an in-service, or attend a seminar. Many health care workers attend continuing education programs at their own expense, but some employers offer free programs at the job site.

### CREDIT

The amount of credit given for each continuing education program usually depends on its length. Each hour of education is worth a certain amount of CEUs. Health care workers should be aware of the continuing education requirements to maintain their license and certification.

### Summary:



Credentialing helps identify health care workers who have met certain standards. Certification, registration, and licensure are all common credentials in the health care industry. While certification is often issued by a national organization, licenses are issued by the state and are only valid in that state, unless a reciprocity agreement exists. Some states require that certain health science technology professionals show proof of continuing education to maintain or renew a license to practice. In addition, some certifying organizations require continuing education for an individual to maintain certification.

## Checking Your Knowledge:

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1. Why is credentialing important?
2. What are the three main types of credentialing?
3. What are some examples of registered or licensed professions?
4. What is a reciprocity agreement?
5. What are CEUs?

## Expanding Your Knowledge:

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Contact a human resources employee at a local health care facility. Be prepared to ask questions about the credentials required for a few specific health care positions. Is any continuing education required? Ask if the facility pays for or offers in-house training for recertification.

## Web Links:

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### **Become a Registered Nurse**

[http://www.allnursingschools.com/faqs/be\\_rn](http://www.allnursingschools.com/faqs/be_rn)

### **Health Care Credentialing**

[http://www.ehow.com/about\\_4674036\\_what-healthcare-credentialing.html](http://www.ehow.com/about_4674036_what-healthcare-credentialing.html)