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Different Types of Board Certified Pharmacists

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Different Types of Board Certified Pharmacists

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...benefits varied from improved self-worth, additional consulting opportunities, advancement of pharmacy practice, job security, salary increases and promotions.

Introduction

Due to increasing complexity in disease states and therapeutic regimens, there is a need for more knowledgeable and experienced medication experts. Through board-specialty certification programs, pharmacists can concentrate on specific areas of health care that require more advanced levels of medication proficiency. The Board of Pharmacy Specialties (BPS) is an independent certification agency of the American Pharmacists Association (APhA).¹ It was created on January 5, 1976, to certify and acknowledge pharmacists involved in specialized pharmacy practice.² Currently, six specialty pharmacy practice areas are recognized by BPS including Ambulatory Care Pharmacy, Nuclear Pharmacy, Nutrition Support Pharmacy, Oncology Pharmacy, Pharmacotherapy and Psychiatric Pharmacy.¹ Also, the Commission for Certification in Geriatric Pharmacy (CCGP) offers a specialty certification program in Geriatric Pharmacy.³

It is important to note that a board certified pharmacist is different than a certified anticoagulation care provider, certified diabetes educator or health care professional that has a certificate in regard to a special skill set. There is a distinction between certification and certificate training because some certificates may indicate participation in a specialized educational program, but do not assess a practitioner's competence.¹

The BPS is the sole agency that operates across the profession of pharmacy to provide specialty certification of pharmacists. Through this specialized certification program, a pharmacist's education, experience, knowledge and skills in a targeted practice area are validated.¹ Many studies have been performed to analyze the benefits realized by board certified pharmacists. Results showed that the benefits varied from improved self-worth, additional consulting opportunities, advancement of pharmacy practice, job security, salary increases and promotions.² Although there are many advantages in becoming a board certified pharmacist, the primary purpose of specialization within the pharmacy practice is to ensure that the public receives the proper level of pharmaceutical care that will improve a patient's quality of life. This article contains information about the different types of board certified pharmacists, including a general overview of the various certification specialties, specific requirements for certification, continuing education needed to maintain certification status, career opportunities and the impact of certification on the health care system.¹

General Requirements

There are some requirements which are the same for all six types of board certified pharmacists. These requirements include:¹

- Graduation from an Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education (ACPE) certified university or international equivalent
- Hold a current valid pharmacy practice license
- Pass a content specific examination
- Complete pharmacy practice experience; varies for each certification
- Pay a yearly certification fee of \$100 (\$400 the seventh year for recertification)

Ambulatory Care Pharmacy

A pharmacist holding the title of Board Certified Ambulatory Care Pharmacist (BCACP) specializes in delivering ambulatory care services to patients on an ambulatory or outpatient basis. Examples of ambulatory services include patient education and counseling on drugs, health promotion and self-management. Ambulatory pharmacists work with other health care professionals to coordinate patient care by bridging the gap between physician follow-ups after a patient is discharged from the hospital. In particular, a BCACP is responsible for monitoring drug therapy to ensure compliance and recommending interventions to prevent adverse medication events. A pharmacist that specializes in ambulatory care takes a lead role in integration of patient care across multiple disciplines and fostering long-term patient-provider relationships.⁴

The general requirements needed for certification are listed above; specific prerequisites needed for certification in ambulatory care include:¹

- Completing one of these three options:
 - Four years of practice experience with at least 50 percent of time spent in ambulatory care pharmacy activities as defined by BPS
 - A PGY1 residency and one extra year of experience with at least 50 percent of time spent in ambulatory care pharmacy activities defined by BPS
 - A specialty PGY2 residency in ambulatory care pharmacy (As of January 1, 2013, all pharmacy residencies must be American Society of Health-System Pharmacists (ASHP) accredited.)
- Passing the Ambulatory Care Specialty Certification Examination

A BCACP must renew his or her certification every seven years by either achieving a passing score on BPS's recertification exam or by accumulating 100 hours of continuing education (CE) credit provided through the development program offered by the American College of Clinical Pharmacy (ACCP) and/or the joint program offered by ASHP and APhA. However, during the first three years of the certification cycle, BPS will accept no more than fifty hours of CE. As well, ASHP and APhA both offer ambulatory care pharmacy preparatory review courses for pharmacists.¹

In terms of career outlook, ambulatory certification gives pharmacists a competitive advantage, as well as a salary raise. However, as a BCACP one must accept a large amount of professional responsibility since he or she is a key component in direct patient medication management. Also, ambulatory pharmacists are in the position to expand the role of the pharmacist in health care by monitoring patient medication usage to ensure compliance and optimizing clinical outcomes. Ambulatory care certified pharmacists have many job opportunities including institutional and community based ambulatory pharmacies, nursing homes, private offices and senior citizen wellness centers.⁴

Nuclear Pharmacy

A Board Certified Nuclear Pharmacist (BCNP) provides expertise not only to the nuclear medicine team, but to patients as well. Nuclear pharmacists have specialized skills in radiopharmaceuticals including compounding, quality control testing, counseling and dispensing. Using radiopharmaceuticals safely and effectively is the main priority of a BCNP.¹

Some requirements must be met to become a BCNP, including those listed at the beginning of this article and the following:¹

- Obtain 4,000 hours training or experience in nuclear pharmacy
- Pass the Nuclear Pharmacy Specialty Certification Examination

The hours required for certification can be obtained in a number of ways, including up to 2,000 hours in an academic setting or 4,000 hours through nuclear training or practice. Academic experience includes nuclear undergraduate or postgraduate courses, M.S. or Ph.D. in nuclear pharmacy, completion of the Nuclear Pharmacy Certificate Program, and completion of the Nuclear Education Online (NEO) program, while training and practice experience is gained through a nuclear pharmacy residency, internship or practice.¹

Recertification is required every seven years and it is a three-step process. The first step involves a self-evaluation, while the second step is a peer review which is to be reviewed by the Specialty Council on Nuclear Pharmacy. The final step is a formal assessment of the pharmacist's knowledge, through either CE or a formal examination. Seventy hours of CE are required and 30 of those hours must be obtained in the last three years before recertification. During the recertification process, BCNPs are also required to complete an annual practice report provided by BPS.¹

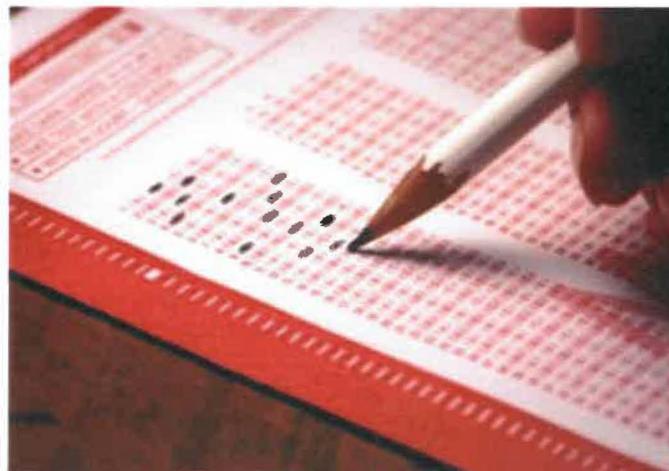


Image: <http://www.pharmacy-tech-resources.com/images/exam2r.jpg>

A pharmacist with this certification could likely see an increase in pay scale and added responsibilities such as oversight of the nuclear pharmacy. Furthermore, nuclear pharmacists provide patients with added reassurance in the safety and quality of medication preparations made for them. Employment opportunities as a BCNP include working with radiopharmaceuticals in a nuclear pharmacy or institutionally in a nuclear medicine department, as well as owning and managing a nuclear pharmacy and research or academia.¹

Nutrition Support Pharmacy

The nutrition support pharmacist is an important team member of many inpatient and outpatient care settings. This pharmacist plays an important role in ensuring that each patient receives proper nutritional support. Their work includes designing and modifying patient specific enteral and parenteral nutrition regimens while collaborating with other health care professionals. This pharmacist includes the title Board Certified Nutrition Support Pharmacist (BCNSP).¹

In order to become a BCNSP, the general requirements mentioned at the beginning of the article must be met. The practice specific requirements for certification are to:¹

- Complete three years of practice with 50 percent of practice time in nutrition support activities, or complete an ASHP certified PGY2 residency in nutrition support pharmacy
- Pass the Nutrition Support Pharmacy Specialty Certification Examination

There is another certification program available to pharmacists in addition to the program through the Board of Certified Pharmacists. This program is available through the National Board of Nutrition Support Certification (NBNSC) and is an interdisciplinary certification including dietitians, nurses, pharmacists and physicians.⁵

Once a pharmacist has become a BCNSP, he or she must be recertified every seven years. The recertification requirements are to complete 30 hours of CE in nutritional support from providers approved by ACPE and to pass a recertification exam. The pharmacist must complete at least 10 hours of CE every 2 years during the seven year period.¹

Becoming a BCNSP has many benefits for the pharmacist, the employer of the pharmacist and the patient receiving treatment. For the pharmacist, having the certification adds credibility to the recommendations made and provides a competitive edge when seeking employment. Job opportunities for BCNSPs include long term care facilities, hospitals and home care. The employer benefits by knowing that the certified pharmacist will stay up-to-date on nutritional developments and be continually refining his or her specialized knowledge base. The patient benefits by being comforted that his or her health care provider is specially certified to provide personalized patient care.¹

Oncology Pharmacy

A Board Certified Oncology Pharmacist (BCOP) plays a major role in medication management of cancer patients by helping design a specific therapeutic plan for chemotherapy. He or she works as part of a health care team to provide optimal drug therapy by implementing a chemotherapy regimen and intervening when necessary. A BCOP also educates and counsels patients and caregivers on therapeutic plans. Furthermore, a BCOP specializes in chemotherapy drugs and acts as an informational resource for other health care professionals. A pharmacist specializing in oncology helps to reduce the risk of complications and adverse events related to chemotherapy drugs.¹



Image complement of photostock: http://www.freedigitalphotos.net/images/Pills_and_Drugs_g279-Medicine_Spilling_Out_p59864.html

Common prerequisites needed to become a BCOP are listed at the beginning of the article, whereas specific stipulations include:¹

- Completing one of these three options:
 - Four years of practice experience with at least 50 percent of time spent in oncology pharmacy activities as defined by BPS
 - Completion of a PGY1 residency and one extra year of experience with at least 50 percent of time spent in oncology pharmacy activities defined by BPS
 - Completion of a specialty PGY2 residency in oncology pharmacy (As of January 1, 2013, all pharmacy residencies must be ASHP accredited.)
- Passing the Oncology Specialty Certification Examination

With regard to maintaining an oncology certified status, a BCOP must be recertified every seven years by either passing a recertification exam administered by BPS or earning 100 hours of CE provided by a professional development program approved by BPS. For instance, in 2005, BPS approved a professional development program, which is offered by ACCP in conjunction with ASHP and the Hematology/Oncology Pharmacy Association (HOPA), that can be used by BCOPs for recertification.¹

A pharmacist specializing in oncology plays a vital role in providing high quality care for cancer patients through a multidisciplinary team approach. Similarly, a BCOP can interpret new drug information and analyze its clinical usefulness in cancer patients. These pharmacists are a valuable resource for physicians whose patients are responding poorly to current medications on the market. Moreover, a BCOP can raise awareness among the public and health care providers regarding cancer-related issues. Benefits as an oncology drug specialist involve a higher salary and competitive advantage. Also, BCOP job opportunities can be found in community hospitals, particularly those with large oncology departments, private doctor offices, and specialty cancer treatment centers.¹

Pharmacotherapy

As a member of a multidisciplinary health care team, a Board Certified Pharmacotherapy Specialist (BCPS), is not only a vital source of drug information, but is also involved in direct patient care. The BCPS pharmacist takes charge of evaluating drug appropriateness, safety and cost effectiveness for each individual patient.¹

Certain requirements must be met in order to become a BCPS, which include those listed at the beginning of this article and also these specific guidelines:¹

- Completion of three years of practice with 50 percent or more time spent doing pharmacotherapy activities, or completion of an ASHP accredited PGY1 residency
- Pass the Pharmacotherapy Specialty Certification Examination

Recertification is required every seven years and can be obtained either through an examination or CE. One-hundred and twenty hours of CE are needed and they can only be obtained through a BPS approved professional development program.¹

Certification in pharmacotherapy also allows for further specialization in a focused area of study. This is available through an added qualification. Currently, only two added qualifications exist, which are specific to pharmacotherapy: Cardiology and Infectious Disease.¹

A BCPS pharmacist possesses increased knowledge regarding drug therapies, thereby facilitating better patient outcomes and decreasing costs of treatment for both the patient and employer. This expertise in pharmacotherapy may result in increased monetary gain for the pharmacist and assurance to the employer that patients are receiving quality care. Possible opportunities for pharmacists who obtain a BCPS include hospital, other institutional care facilities, ambulatory care, teaching and research.¹

Psychiatric Pharmacy

The psychiatric pharmacist works with an interdisciplinary team of health care professionals to direct the pharmaceutical care of patients with psychiatric related illnesses. Specific responsibilities include optimizing medication regimens by ensuring safety and efficacy, along with other unique opportunities such as offering education programs, assisting with formulary decisions, and conducting original research.⁶ This pharmacist uses the title Board Certified Psychiatric Pharmacist (BCPP).¹

In order to become a BCPP, one must meet the requirements listed at the beginning of the article. The practice specific requirements for a BCPP are:¹

- Complete either four years of practice with at least 50 percent of time in psychiatric pharmacy activities, or complete a PGY2 residency in psychiatric pharmacy plus one year of practice with at least 50 percent of time in psychiatric pharmacy activities
- Pass the Psychiatric Pharmacy Specialty Certification Exam

A BCPP must be recertified every seven years to maintain their BCPP title. The recertification requirements include:¹

- Completion of one of two options:
 - Pass the recertification exam
 - Earn 100 hours of CE provided by a BPS approved provider (including a review course at least once during each seven year recertification cycle)

Benefits of being a BCPP are similar to those of other pharmacy certifications including assurance of staying up-to-date in his or her area of focus, possible monetary compensation for certification, and patient satisfaction in knowing that his or her pharmacist has been specially trained for their need. Various job opportunities for a BCPP include academia, administration, ambulatory care, hospitals, forensic centers, long term care facilities and research.¹

Geriatric Pharmacy

The certification to become a Certified Geriatric Pharmacist (CGP) is not through the BPS, but through the Commission for Certification in Geriatric Pharmacy (CCGP). According to the CCGP, becoming a CGP is essential for pharmacists who provide Medication Therapy Management (MTM) to geriatric patients. The certification includes education regarding medications as related to disease states and also as related to the aging process in general.³

Requirements to become certified as a CGP through the CCGP include:³

- Hold a current pharmacy license
- Have at least two years of experience as a licensed pharmacist
- Pass a computer based exam
- Application fee of \$600 plus a maintenance fee of \$250 for the five year certification
 - The maintenance fee is used for education and other services to CGP

Requirements to become recertified include:³

- Recertification every five years
- Fee of \$400 plus a maintenance fee of \$250
- Completion of one of two options:
 - Retake the CGP exam
 - Professional Development Pathway: Complete 75 hours of CCGP approved CE
 - ◆ These hours are also ACPE approved and may be used toward pharmacy license maintenance

Many potential jobs are available to CGPs, especially through long term care facilities. These opportunities are increasing as the population ages and companies become more aware of the value of pharmacists and MTM. Some long term care facilities already require their pharmacists to be CGPs. Besides the unique job opportunities, this certification provides an edge in the market, opportunity for promotion, and the satisfaction of knowing that one is providing the best patient care possible.³

These certifications will enhance skills and knowledge that can provide pharmacists with the tools needed for direct patient care and enhanced qualification for specific career paths within pharmacy.

Conclusion

Many certifications are currently available to allow pharmacists the opportunity to specialize in focused areas of pharmacy including Ambulatory Care Pharmacy, Nuclear Pharmacy, Nutrition Support Pharmacy, Oncology Pharmacy, Pharmacotherapy, Psychiatric Pharmacy, and Geriatric Pharmacy. These certifications will enhance skills and knowledge that can provide pharmacists with the tools needed for direct patient care and enhanced qualification for specific career paths within pharmacy. More specialized programs for pharmacists will likely become available in the future as well. These could include additional qualifications from BPS. Although currently only two added qualifications exist specifically for pharmacotherapy, new added qualifications can be created for any of the specialties. These can be formed with a petition signed by at least 25 pharmacists that are certified in the same BPS specialty.¹



Image complement of free stock photos: <http://www.freestockphotos.biz/stockphoto/17338>

The future of pharmacy practice is leaning toward focus and specialization. Receiving certifications such as the BPS certifications detailed above or even ones to come in the future, will provide pharmacists with specialized skills, education and knowledge as well as a competitive edge in order to provide optimal drug therapy to the public.¹

Table 1: Key Terms

Abbreviation	Definition
ACCP	American College of Clinical Pharmacy
ACPE	Accreditation Council for Pharmacy Education
APhA	American Pharmacists Association
ASHP	American Society of Health-System Pharmacists
BCACP	Board Certified Ambulatory Care Pharmacist
BCNP	Board Certified Nuclear Pharmacist
BCNSP	Board Certified Nutrition Support Pharmacist
BCOP	Board Certified Oncology Pharmacist
BCPP	Board Certified Psychiatric Pharmacist
BCPS	Board Certified Pharmacotherapy Specialist
BPS	Board of Pharmacy Specialties
CCGP	Commission for Certification in Geriatric Pharmacy
CE	Continuing Education
CGP	Certified Geriatric Pharmacist
HOPA	Hematology/Oncology Pharmacy Association
MTM	Medication Therapy Management
NBNSC	National Board of Nutrition Support Certification
NEO	Nuclear Education Online
PGY	Post Graduate Year

Table 2: Overview of Requirements for Board Certified Pharmacists¹

Types of Board Certifications	General Requirements for BPS Certification	Pharmacy Practice Experience Requirements for Certification	Requirements for Recertification (every seven years for BPS certifications)
Ambulatory Care Pharmacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Graduation from an ACPE certified university or international equivalent 2. Hold a current valid pharmacy practice license 3. Pass a content specific examination 	<p>Complete one of three options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Four years of practice experience with at least 50 percent of time spent in ambulatory care pharmacy activities 2. A PGY1 residency and one extra year of experience with at least 50 percent of time spent in ambulatory care pharmacy activities 3. A specialty PGY2 residency in ambulatory care pharmacy 	<p>Complete one of two options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pass a recertification exam 2. 100 hours of CE in ambulatory care pharmacy
Nuclear Pharmacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Complete pharmacy practice experience; varies for each certification 5. Pay a yearly certification fee of \$100 (\$400 the seventh year for recertification) 	<p>Obtain 4,000 hours of training or experience in nuclear pharmacy</p>	<p>Three-step process:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Self-evaluation 2. Peer review that is looked over by the Specialty Council on Nuclear Pharmacy 3. Formal assessment of the pharmacist's knowledge, through either 700 hours of CE or a formal examination
Nutrition Support Pharmacy		<p>Complete one of two options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Three years of practice with 50 percent of practice time in nutrition support activities 2. An ASHP certified PGY2 residency in nutrition support pharmacy 	<p>Complete 30 hours of CE in nutritional support and pass a recertification exam</p>
Oncology Pharmacy		<p>Complete one of three options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Four years of practice experience with at least 50 percent of time spent in oncology pharmacy activities 2. A PGY1 residency and one extra year of experience with at least 50 percent of time spent in oncology pharmacy activities 3. A specialty PGY2 residency in oncology pharmacy 	<p>Complete one of two options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pass a recertification exam 2. 100 hours of CE in oncology pharmacy
Pharmacotherapy		<p>Complete one of two options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Three years of practice with 50 percent or more time spent doing pharmacotherapy activities 2. An ASHP accredited PGY1 residency 	<p>Complete one of two options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pass a recertification exam 2. 120 hours of CE in pharmacotherapy
Psychiatric Pharmacy		<p>Complete one of two options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Four years of practice with at least 50 percent of time in psychiatric pharmacy activities 2. A PGY2 residency in psychiatric pharmacy plus one year of practice with at least 50 percent of time in psychiatric pharmacy activities 	<p>Complete one of two options:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pass a recertification exam 2. 100 hours of CE in psychiatric pharmacy (including a review course at least once during each seven year recertification cycle)
*Geriatric Pharmacy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Hold a current pharmacy license 2. Pass a computer based exam 3. Application fee of \$600 plus a maintenance fee of \$250 for the five year certification 	<p>Have at least two years of experience as a licensed pharmacist</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Recertification every five years 2. Fee of \$400 plus a maintenance fee of \$25 3. Complete one of two options: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Retake the CGP exam B. 75 hours of CCGP approved CE

**The certification to become a Certified Geriatric Pharmacist is not through the Board of Pharmacy Specialties, but through the Commission for Certification in Geriatric Pharmacy. Therefore, it has different requirements for certification and renewal that are specific for Geriatric Pharmacy.³*

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