

Micro-credentials and badges in healthcare

An opportunity to highlight your skills and experience

By Erik P. Southard, DNP, RN, FNP-BC

HEALTHCARE evolves continually, and our knowledge base is always expanding. With each new treatment discovered, intervention pioneered, and virus encountered, caring for patients grows increasingly complex. As the healthcare ecosystem looks to expand its workforce to meet the growing needs and expectations of consumers, nurses and other healthcare professionals must possess widely varying and verified skillsets. Enter micro-credentials and badges.

Micro-credentials explained

Micro-credentials and badges sound like something you might earn at summer camp after learning to crochet or ride a horse. What they really are is the newest way to recognize healthcare professionals for the specialized knowledge and skills they've developed. A *micro-credential* can be earned by demonstrating competency in a specific area. The *badge* is simply a visual representation of that credential to display as part of your personal digital file or place on your curriculum vitae. In some scenarios, badges are stacked as part of an abbreviated program over time to ultimately fulfill the requirements for a micro-credential. Few have heard of this emerging trend (and terminology is still in flux), but micro-credentials are gaining momentum in healthcare practice and education.

Micro-credentials in practice

Already popular in business and information technology, one of the first known micro-credentials offered by a professional nursing organization emerged during the pandemic. The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses (AACN) developed the COVID-19 Pulmonary and Ventilator Care Micro-Credential in the fall of 2020. The course provides a mechanism to validate your knowledge in caring for mechani-



cally ventilated patients. This 90-minute, 38-item examination has no distinct eligibility requirements. You can access the course, "COVID-19 pulmonary, ARDS, and ventilator resources," for free by creating an account with AACN. This particular micro-credential isn't accredited and doesn't have renewal requirements or titling privileges; however, it provides a way to showcase verified skills to potential employers.

Micro-credentials in education

Institutions of higher education have also joined the world of micro-credentialing. With micro-credentials available on topics that range from advanced physical assessment to life care planning, opportunities to showcase your talents and accomplishments continue to expand. Degree-granting institutions seek meaningful ways to combine micro-credentials with traditional degrees to set graduates apart from the pack and provide them with a distinction over other jobseekers. For example, micro-credentials on important and timely top-

ics, such as addressing public health disparities or interprofessional collaborative practice, are currently available.

Micro-credentials vs. certifications and CNE

The utility of micro-credentials to employees and employers hasn't been determined, and the standards and policies around them continue to evolve. But they provide a unique way to highlight your particular skills and demonstrate your alignment with various job descriptions.

However, micro-credentials aren't like certifications, and they're not the same as continuing nursing education (CNE). Certifications, for example, usually are accredited and standardized across a profession. Although micro-credentials can reliably expand your knowledge and skills or remain current on a clinical topic, they're not as tightly regulated as CNE.

Not all micro-credentials are created equal—some provide college credits, some qualify for CNE via an accrediting body, and some simply support upskilling and indicate a basic understanding of a topic. Wide variability exists in the application of the term “micro-creden-

tial,” and much remains to sort out in how they can be acquired and applied.

Lifelong learning

Although the future of micro-credentials in healthcare and nursing education is uncertain, the trend seems to be gaining favor among nurses. An online search will show the many ways nurses have benefitted from micro-credentials and how badges on a resume set nurses apart from their colleagues. However, proceed with caution. Look for quality offerings from reputable sources, and remember the importance of lifelong learning no matter how it's packaged.

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References

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of health or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for statistical tracking. Monitoring specimen cultures will protect healthcare staff, visitors, and the community. (See *Quick assessment*.)



Take advantage of the EHR

The application of artificial intelligence in the electronic health record (EHR) to support clinical decision making has proved beneficial for detecting sepsis in the hospital setting. As clinicians enter vital signs and lab results in the EHR, the system collects and analyzes the data and triggers an alert when sepsis criteria are met. The EHR system integrates an early warning system and enables a collaborative approach, prompting earlier treatment for patients and resulting in better outcomes.

Win the race

Sepsis is a medical emergency that requires immediate treatment to reduce morbidity and mortality. Nurses and providers must race against time as the patient's body begins to decompensate. Your thorough assessment skills and clinical judgement are critical to early detection and prompt treatment. Incorporate all available data (blood tests, imaging studies, and cultures) to further support your suspicions. Consider using the qSOFA tool if you're concerned about poor patient outcomes and encourage your facility to integrate a sepsis algorithm into the electronic health record to help manage patient information more efficiently and effectively. (See *Take advantage of the EHR*.)

Taking steps when you suspect a patient is at high risk for sepsis can halt its progress. Ultimately, you'll improve patient outcomes, decrease length of stay, and reduce overall healthcare costs.

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Access references at myamericannurse.com/?p=292995.

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