

SPECIALTY NURSING ORGANIZATIONS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERIOPERATIVE EXCELLENCE

Author: Margaret Farley¹ ORT, RN, BSN, CPN(C).

Affiliations:: ¹Faculty, Perioperative Nursing Program, School of Nursing, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, Regina, SK, Canada.

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ABSTRACT

Specialty nursing organizations are described as those for specific practice areas (e. g. geriatrics) within nursing. Members share similar interests, or a passion for a specialty area, and come together to create a group or pursue membership in an established specialty group.

This paper describes the evolution of specialty nursing organizations and how they represent specific areas of nursing practice. The benefits of membership shall be described using Operating Room Nurses Association (ORNAC) and the Saskatchewan periOperative Registered Nurses Group (SORNG) to demonstrate examples.

INTRODUCTION

Nursing Specialty Organizations place an emphasis on specific nursing practice within a defined area of nursing. This

usually includes a focus on competencies, guidelines, or standards for that specific nursing practice area (e.g. surgical suites/OR). It brings together groups of individuals who share a hunger or thirst for a specific area of nursing along with a desire to increase personal knowledge, create growth, and strengthen skills.⁸

They are created by individuals who feel the need, at the same time, to join together and who then produce the necessary actions to form a group.⁴

This is done to promote professional growth, build competence, create peer-to-peer support, and to influence patient safety and care in a specific area.^{3,4}

There are a number of titles used for these specific nursing bodies which include Professional Practice Groups (PPG),⁹ Specialty Practice Groups (SPG),^{10,11} Special Interest Groups (SIG),¹² and Interest Groups.¹³

History of Nursing Organizations:

Nursing organizations have existed for many years. The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA), a professional voice representing most provincial and territorial jurisdictions nationally and internationally, was formed in 1908¹ and the International Council of Nurses (ICN), a federation of 130 nursing associations from around the world, was founded in 1899.² Over 100 years after the establishment of those organizations' nurses continue to become members of the national and international groups but also to create new specialty nursing groups.

Nursing in general must adapt to survive the myriad of changes in nursing, healthcare, medicine, and in particular, technology. The pace at which change is occurring is relentless and constant. Specialty nursing organizations are able to help with vast changes and challenges while moving nursing forward by using,

listening to, and allowing their specialty group members to help keep pace with new developments, trends, procedures, technology, equipment, and other needs. The surgical suites/OR theatres known as perioperative nursing is one such specialty area.⁷

As healthcare in Canada is a provincial responsibility, and nursing is regulated by the provincial/territorial nursing bodies our specialty groups often have regional groups as well. As an example, in the author's home province the provincial licensing body, the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association (SRNA), has, under its umbrella, the Saskatchewan periOperative Registered Nurses' Group (SORNG) – a PPG that represents the specialty on a provincial level. SRNA assists SORNG and SORNG participates in SRNA functions and meetings and keeps its members informed of SRNA information. SORNG also supports the objectives of ORNAC.

Specialty groups exist around the world. The Association for Perioperative Practice (AfPP) in Great Britain (originally established in 1964 under the name National Association of Theatre Nurses)⁴ and the Australian College of Perioperative Nurses (ACORN) began with several nurses meeting informally at a medical conference in 1971 and hosting their first conference, Australasian Conference of Operating Room Nurses (from which the ACORN acronym was created) in 1977 and their first national council meeting in 1978.⁵

Young made an assessment about the presence and growth of specialty nursing groups in a short editorial published in 1973.⁶ Forty-seven years later, in 2021, specialty nursing appears to be here to stay.

Specialized Nursing

Collectively nursing requires a strong unified voice on the many issues facing them; nursing specialty groups do need to liaise with one another on overlapping or shared issues⁶. This may be achieved via your licensing body or

via a larger national focused nursing body such as CNA or ORNAC.

Graduates from basic/undergraduate nursing programs are considered a general duty nurse or 'generalist'. Registered psychiatric nurses are the only Canadian nurses that are recognized, upon graduation, to be a specialty and this role is found predominantly in the western provinces.⁷ Practice settings like hospitals, long-term care facilities, nursing homes, and rehabilitation centres are the institutions where, in the 1970s, nursing roles changed and expanded and produced the specialized nurse.⁷

The concept and practice of nurses specializing in one area of practice produced the types of specialty nursing groups we see today. Specialized practice environments are not new to us but the world we live and practice in today has seen an increased amount of specialization likely due to the increased amount of complex technology in our workplaces. Within our perioperative specialty some centres have teams who work a great deal in one area, such as orthopaedics, where there are numerous types of hip arthroplasty approaches, equipment, instruments, or implants highlighting the importance of experts within perioperative nursing.

Nurses today want to set their own professional goals, manage their continuing competency, assist in the creation or updating of standards and/or guidelines within a specific nursing practice setting,^{6,8} and to promote clinical excellence within their nursing specialty.¹⁴

As specialty nursing groups are not regulatory bodies, and membership is not a requirement to practice, they are voluntary and, as such, can face challenges with ebbs and flows of membership. The author's experience, as a longtime member of SORNG, has been that membership numbers are lower in years when there is not an ORNAC national conference. The struggles, growth and, recognition of specialty nursing groups has continued

Membership in specialty nursing organizations has benefits both individually and collectively.

ever since Young brought attention to specialty groups in 1973⁶ but dedication to the specialty and a desire to maintain contact with others in their area of practice seems to be sustaining perioperative nursing groups today.

BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

Sharing of knowledge:

Membership in specialty nursing organizations has benefits both individually and collectively. The ability to share specialized nursing knowledge with membership provides increased contact with various associated and allied organizations and takes knowledge sharing beyond individual workplaces. Becoming a member of a specialty organization locally, provincially/territorially, or nationally allows the national body to act as a spokesperson for perioperative nurses collectively.¹⁵ This, in turn, helps create additional opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Members benefit from increased awareness of practices and advancements within their specific field of expertise. Membership also provides individuals with the opportunity to assist in developing, promoting, implementing, and using specialty guidelines or standards for the benefit of a larger number of patients. Membership can also provide members with access to related specialty groups – ORNAC, as an example, provides ties to CNA as well as to 45 other national specialty nursing organizations in Canada that are linked to or associated with CNA via the Canadian Network of Nursing Specialties.¹⁶ The list of other members provides quick access to other specialty nursing groups allowing perioperative members to request information from other colleagues within the Canadian Network of Nursing Specialties under the CNA umbrella.

Specialty nursing is strengthened by knowledge, understanding, and fellowship and all three allow individuals to further advance their personal professional growth.¹⁷ Membership in a specialty nursing organization provides

opportunities for members to network with others who are like-minded at either a local or broader level.^{18,19}

Keeping Current:

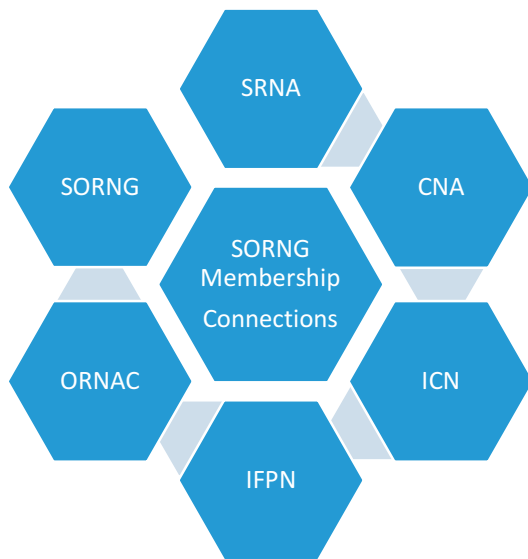
Membership helps members to remain current within a specialty.²⁰ Specialty membership allows individuals to identify current emerging issues, and trends specific to the perioperative setting.¹⁷ Sharing knowledge and skills amongst peers enhances patient safety and helps develop and promote knowledge, competency, and standards of patient care.²¹ Membership helps build expertise within the specialty, assists with socialization and mentorship,⁹ and improves patient care.²²

Current research and trends can also be provided via a specialty journal (e.g. ORNAC Journal) which is often part of membership fees or available to members at a discounted subscription rate.¹⁸ Other membership benefits may include reduced conference attendance rates for local, regional, provincial/territorial, national, or international conferences.^{16,18} These specialty focused conferences bring together experts from various sectors of the profession – including perioperative team members, related departments, and industry. The conference experience provides exposure to new information from researchers and experts, allows members to gain the perspective of other members of the perioperative team from around the world, allows for networking with other specialty nurses, and offers the opportunity to demo new products and obtain manufacturer support on product applications or new procedures.

Professional and Career Development:

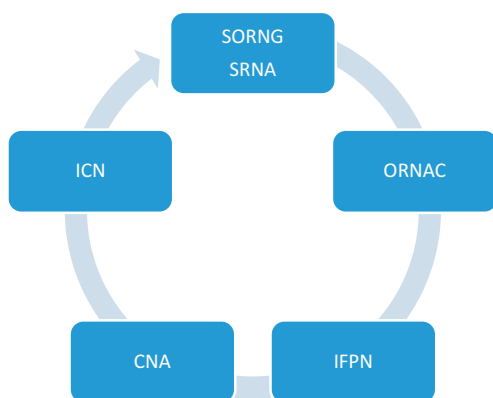
Membership generally also provides the ability to vote at the organization's Annual General Meeting (AGM) and to weigh in on issues that will shape the future of the organization or the standards of the profession. Members can do the same by seeking positions on the organization's board or its committees.¹⁶

Figure 1. Expanding potential membership benefits and contacts.



This figure shows the connections related to membership in SORNG and how it expands to include similar, larger, national and international links to other perioperative or related specialty groups.

Figure 2. Provincial organizations' (SORNG) connections to other nursing organizations.



Becoming a member of SORNG/ORNAC allows for a more national and, ultimately, an international focus on perioperative nursing with an ever-expanding circle of connections to other nursing bodies.

Networking opportunities are no longer restricted to a facility, city, region, province/territory, or country. Membership in most organizations provides the ability to connect with other like-minded nurses without geographical restrictions through member blogs and social media.^{18,19} Membership in a specialty group can also lead to opportunities to work or volunteer internationally with an organization such as International Council of Nurses (ICN) or International Federation of Perioperative Nurses (IFPN) which can broaden an individual's perspective while helping to create and nurture global partnerships.²³

In some cases membership in one group provides automatic membership in a related group – as an example joining ORNAC provides membership in a provincial perioperative nursing group (which is often supported by the applicable licensing bodies or nursing colleges) to give members a provincial/territorial perioperative nursing voice.²⁴ Membership in ORNAC also includes membership in IFPN, and CNA (as part of its specialty network).¹⁵ ORNAC members also have the option of joining groups that address issues for specific segments of the profession – Canadian Operating Room Leaders (CORL), Perioperative Nurse Educators of Canada (PNEC), and RNFA Network of Canada (RNFANC).

Global Impact:

Specialty organizations are positioned to form global partnerships with new or emerging specialty groups, support the creation of new organizations specialty standards or guidelines, share knowledge and expertise in the provision of safe patient care, and provide mentor-style support for emerging specialty groups. These collaborations may also lead to international standards, collaborative research, and educational support.²³

Continuing Education:

Membership assists with continuing professional competence¹⁹ and helps with personal professional growth.^{10,14} This assists in enhancing safety and patient

care.²² Continuing competence/education is available within a specialty practice group via a number of avenues such as access to local perioperative events such as meet and greet sessions, evening lectures, webinars, or local education days. Education events can also partner with other groups to expand knowledge related to perioperative practice but not specific to the perioperative nursing role. SORNG, for example, has partnered with its provincial PeriAnesthesia Nurses Group, (PANGS) for events with increased attendance that are more cost-effective and provide opportunities to share perspectives with another department closely linked to OR nursing – the Post Anaesthesia Care Unit (PACU) which has a vital link to the perioperative practice environment.

Inviting other associated groups, such as ambulatory care units, outpatient surgery units, surgical free standing or private surgical clinics, and medical device reprocessing departments, to attend specialty focused conferences or events are ways to increase comprehension and understanding of other specialized areas which increases communication and support between the various professional groups.

Being part of a specialty group is a fertile environment for using and expanding personal knowledge and skills related to other specialty groups (e.g. infection prevention and control), anatomy and physiology, teamwork, communication, organizational abilities, applying the principles of asepsis, developing the use of aseptic techniques, honing a surgical conscience, or using critical thinking skills for perioperative nursing and patient care.²⁵

Events and Awards:

Members may also have access to specialty group bursaries, grants or awards.²⁴ Access to, and notification about specialty events (e.g. Perioperative Nurses Week), educational events, webinars, or regional, national, and international conferences can also be a benefit of membership.

Lobbying for perioperative nursing may take place at a variety of levels such as

the inclusion of OR practicums in basic nursing education programs²⁶ or whilst attending events sponsored by other specialty organizations. This lobbying benefits the profession and the association members as a collective.

Other specialty organizations of interest to members (e.g. when working in another country) may offer a membership category to the members of other organizations.

Standards

A benefit of specialty organizations is they can, and do, offer specialized resources such as standards or guidelines that can be used within formal specialty educational programs (e.g. perioperative programs). Specific specialty groups are a valuable resource to assist in providing customized, focused education in a specialty nursing practice.²⁷ Developing specialty resources by various groups benefits nursing in general, those working in a specialty, and patients. The ability to consult standardized guidelines of practice, that do not vary from hospital to hospital or region to region, is invaluable to nurses and of benefit to all members. We are often reminded nursing has difficulty expressing the expertise used in caring for patients. So, what better way than to create, contribute to, and offer knowledge and skills to these specialty resources?²⁸

CNA Certification

One goal of specialty groups is often to create national standards about professional competency for nurses who demonstrate an extensive knowledge in a specific clinical specialty area such as perioperative (operating room) nursing. Certification in a specialty via CNA provides nurses with a specialty credential which may be used along with other credentials.²⁹ The certification process also helps strengthen specialty recognition which further supports the specialty group.

The presence of specialty groups drives the desire for and creation of specialty knowledge and standards of practice as

well as a desire for recognition of specialty knowledge. Certification specialty exams draw upon the information in specialty standards (e.g. the ORNAC Standards¹⁴) as a reference base, along with perioperative textbooks and other allied nursing texts, for certification exam questions. In this way specialty groups promote the highest possible standards for those practicing and help strengthen the recognition of their members' expertise.

Individual perioperative groups sometimes also offer their members financial compensation for completion of certification.

Nevidjon (2018) noted, while reviewing an old tape from the 1980s, that specialty "certification was called a new trend, fad even, but was expected to grow."^{30(p.10)} Like many things in life nursing specialties have grown and changed over time.³⁰ There are currently 22 specialties that have CNA certification available to them. Perioperative nursing is one example and Canadian perioperative nursing standards,¹⁴ driven by the specialty group, are available to use by those planning to write the exam. CNA also reviews certification exam questions regularly and standards are used as a guidepost for new content or to update existing content to assist with this process. In this way the association producing the guidelines helps direct the continuing education process of certification and helps ensure consistency of skills and knowledge across the country.

The first perioperative certification exam was offered in 1995 and Vachon (2015) noted, on the 20th anniversary of perioperative nursing certification, that there were 3,650 certified perioperative RNs, using the CPN(C) credential, with 1,555 of the original exam writers still listed in the certification registry 20 years later.³¹ Taking the exam is a personal choice that is beyond the requirements of nursing licensure but it might, however, be considered advantageous by some employers, facilities, or departments in demonstrating expertise in a specialty, has a basic or advanced level of

knowledge, specialized skills, and a commitment to the specialty.³² The additional step of acquiring nursing specialty credentials echoes a personal commitment to ongoing education over the five-year certification term.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Specialty nursing organizations form to meet the needs of nurses and various patient populations within nursing.⁶ This also helps in developing and sustaining a skilled nursing body.³⁰

By focusing resources on one particular specialty the specialty group helps its members provide the "safest" care to each (surgical) patient while advocating for recognition of the profession, providing the sharing of knowledge, and creating peer-to-peer relationships.¹⁶ The strength of numbers ensures a voice for the profession as well as helping all in it remain current on trends and standards.

Meeting the needs of patients during a surgical journey is part of perioperative nursing practice. Specialty nursing groups help provide members with the support they need to achieve focused knowledge and skills and to assist in increasing patient safety.

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