



Registered Practical Nurses  
Association of Ontario

# Canadian Practical Nurse Certification – GPNC(C)

Feedback from 2020 Examinees

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# Background

The Canadian Nurses Association (CNA) voted in June 2019 to begin accepting memberships from Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs) and Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs). The first examination for practical nursing certification in gerontology was offered in November 2019. 35 LPN/RPNs wrote the 2019 exam. 100% successfully received the designation Gerontology Practical Nurse Certified (C)anada GPNC(C)®. In comparison, 116 Registered Nurses sat a separate 2019 exam with 95% success rate (averaging 85-90% success rate over several years). CNA reported that experience has demonstrated that often a higher rate of success is noticed on the first exam of a new exam category as the first cohort is often comprised of strong nurses in the specialty.

WeRPN, the professional association of RPNs in Ontario was interested in promoting the certification for RPNs by seeking to understand from RPNs who had achieved success on the first offering, some of the main reasons and benefits for obtaining this specialty credential.

WeRPN sponsored a survey, developed using Survey Monkey, in consultation with WeRPN professional practice associates, clinicians and researchers associated with Canadian Gerontological Nursing Association (CGNA) and CNA. The survey was delivered through e-link by CNA between July – September 2020. Twenty-one eligible LPN/RPNs completed the survey.



**"I really enjoyed the experience. Questions were appropriate and challenged me"**

Participants' demographics information revealed:

- over 50% were staff nurses (11), followed by 29% (6) in formal leadership positions (Executive Director, Director of Care, Manager), 14% (3) in professional practice, and 5% (1) retired (Figure 2).
- 66% (14) were employed in long-term care and retirement homes settings, followed by hospitals (10%, 2), community care (10%, 2), private practice (10%, 2) and primary care (5%, 1).
- 76%(16) were in full-time positions, followed by 10% (2) in part-time and 10% (2) in casual positions, and 5% (1) retired.
- Over 50% had at least 13 years' experience, [33% (7) have 13-20 years, 19% (4) had 21 years] as an LPN/RPN; 24% (5) had 8-12 years, 14% (3) had 4-7 years and 10% (2) had 1-3 years.
- 90% (19) of the examinees had 4 or more years of practice working with patients 65 years of age and over (Figure 1)

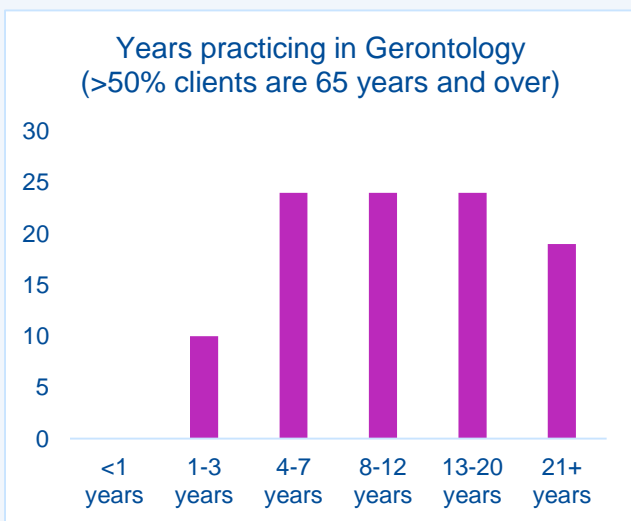


Figure 1: Years Practicing in Gerontology

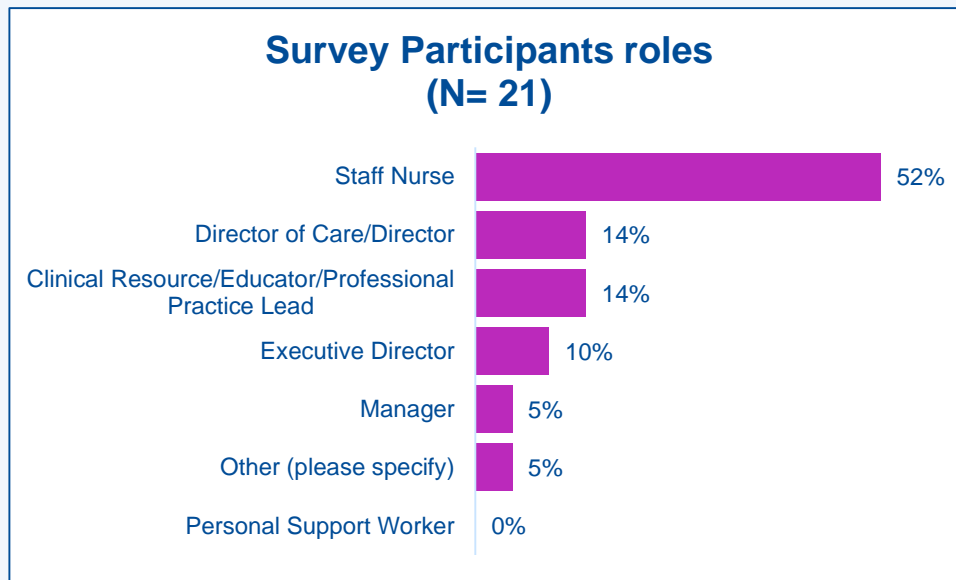


Figure 2: Roles of Participants

## Results

The top 5 reasons for taking the examination were opportunity, professional special interest, anticipated increased respect for specialty knowledge, proficiency and expertise in gerontology, and to enhance clinical practice (See Table 1). All reasons for seeking certification can be found in Figure 3.

**Table 1: Top 5 reasons for seeking certification:**

The certification for LPN/RPNs was recently made available, so I took the opportunity.	59%. (13)
Gerontology is a professional choice and a passion for me.	50%, (11)
Specialty certification will increase respect for my knowledge as an LPN/RPN.	50%, (11)
I wanted to demonstrate my proficiency and expertise in the area of gerontology.	45%, (10)
I wanted to enhance my care practice.	41%, (9)

*“I wrote for the CNA exam because it is a nationally recognized certificate and a new opportunity for RPN/LPNs, which are not widely available.”  
(Participant #2)*

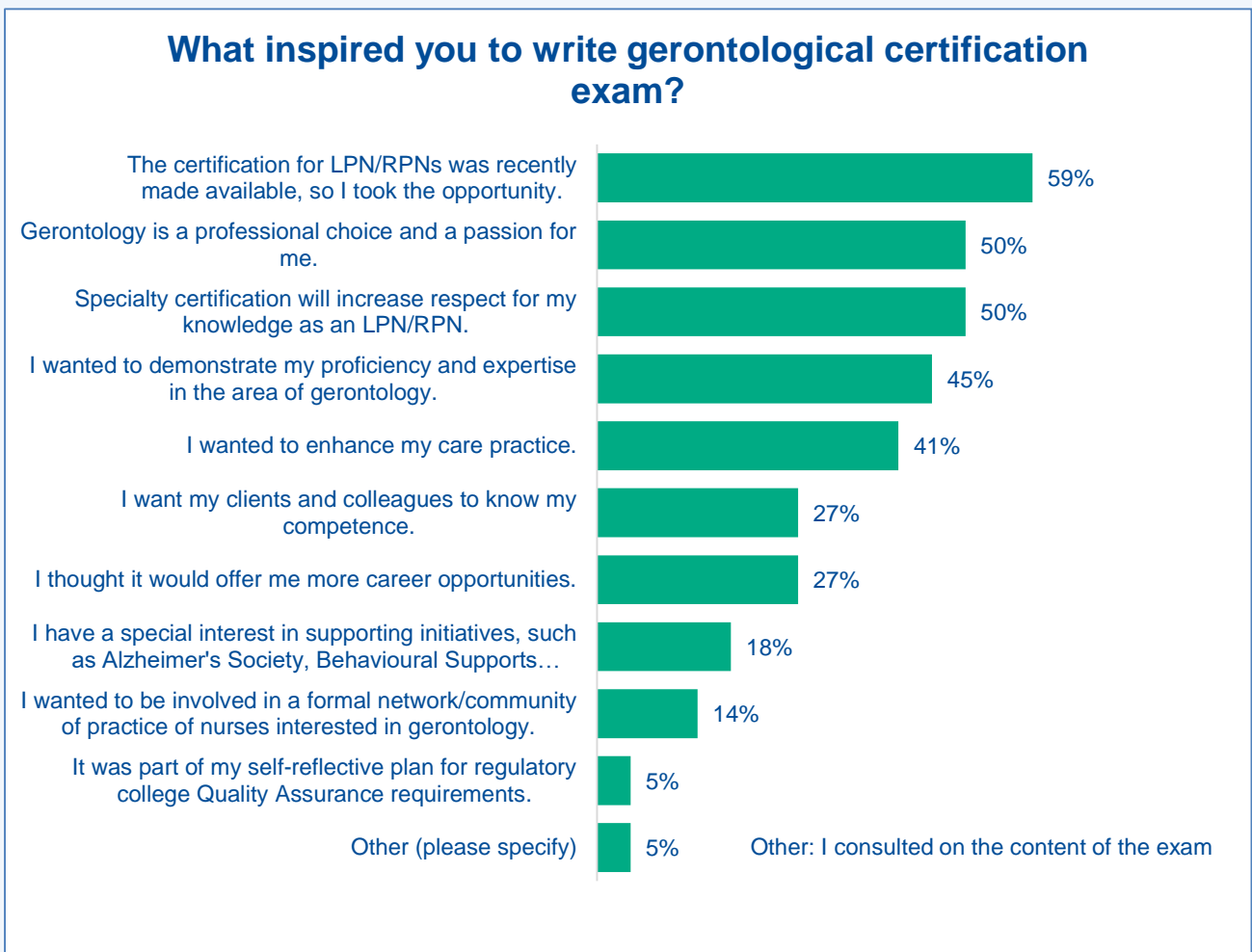


Figure 3: All reasons for seeking certification

The top 5 benefits of GPNC(C) certification were commitment, confidence, and credibility or the individual perceived no benefit at all (Table 2).

**Table 2: Top Benefits of Certification**

The credential demonstrates my commitment as a professional to my manager/formal leaders.	62%, (13)
I am more confident when I speak to physicians, RNs, and other colleagues about my client concerns.	43%, (9)
I have increased my credibility among my formal leaders and colleagues.	38%, (8)
I have increased my credibility among clients and their families.	38%, (8)
I have not experienced any benefits since achieving this credential.	29%, (6)

### Benefits of having GPNC(C) certification (N= 21)

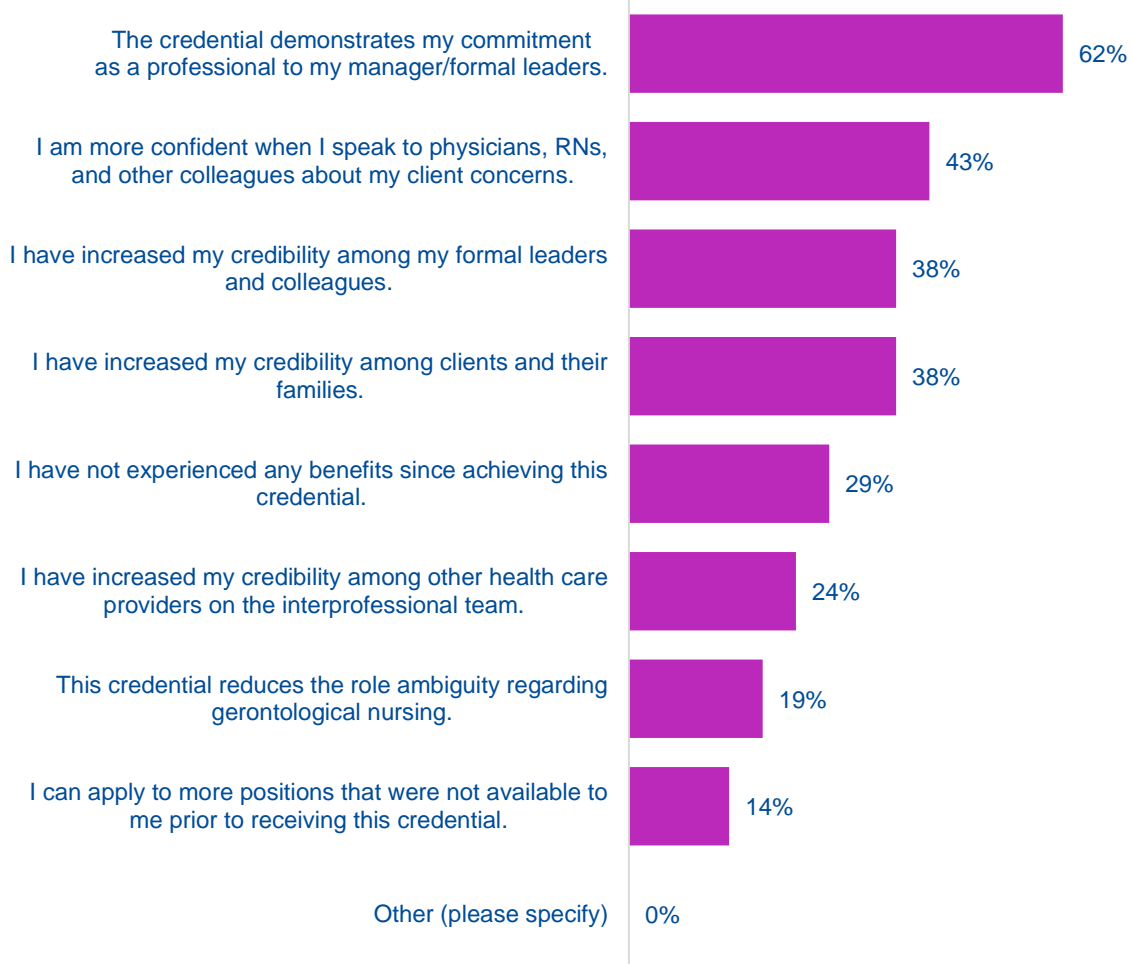


Figure 4: Benefits of having certification

The certification process has impacted the professional growth of the examinees by strengthening their professional portfolio, offering continuous learning opportunities, increased their commitment to professional development and the specialty knowledge is more embedded in their practice.

## How CPNC(C) certification affected professional growth

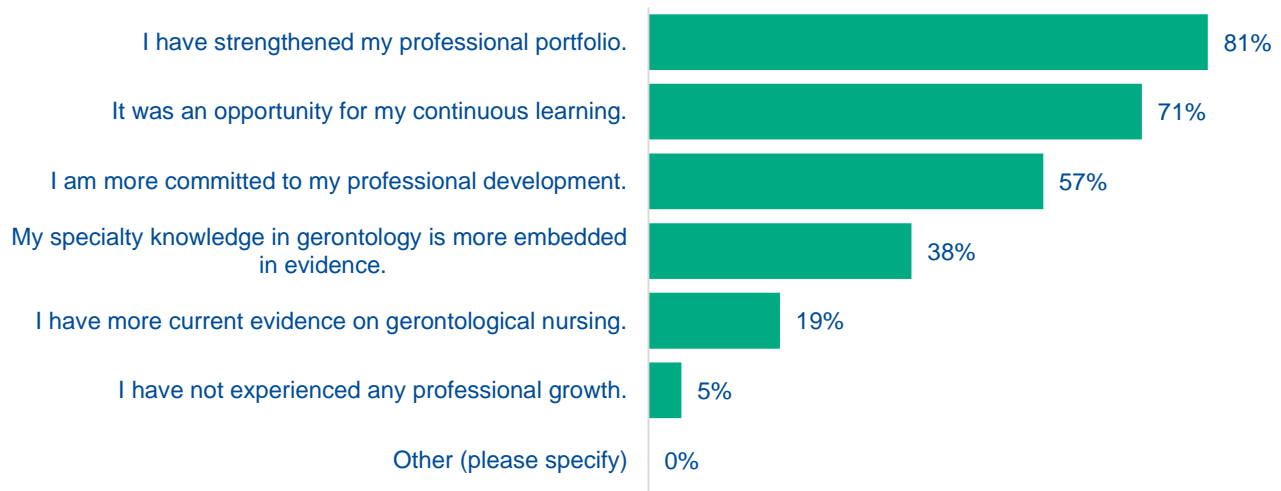


Figure 4: Certification impact on professional growth

Impact on care provision suggested that the majority of examinees felt affirmed, refreshed and current in their knowledge, critical thinking and decision-making skills and abilities when providing care to geriatric patients. Several also indicated an enhanced ability to integrate clients and families into treatment planning for the clients' needs.

## Improvements in my abilities to work with geriatric patients (N= 21)



Figure 5: Impact of certification on improving my abilities with geriatric clients

The top 5 changes to the practice of these certified professionals are increased pride, inclination to teach colleagues, awareness of gerontological interventions, attentiveness to symptoms of geriatric conditions, and improved care planning (see Table 3):

**Table 3: Top Changes to Practice**

I have increased pride in my practice.	81%, (17)
I am more inclined to teach others about gerontological-specific assessments, criteria and protocols.	71%, (15)
I am more aware of interventions that would be successful with an older person.	62%, (13)
I am more attentive to symptoms of older persons' conditions, such as delirium.	52%, (11)
I conduct better care planning for my clients.	43%, (9)

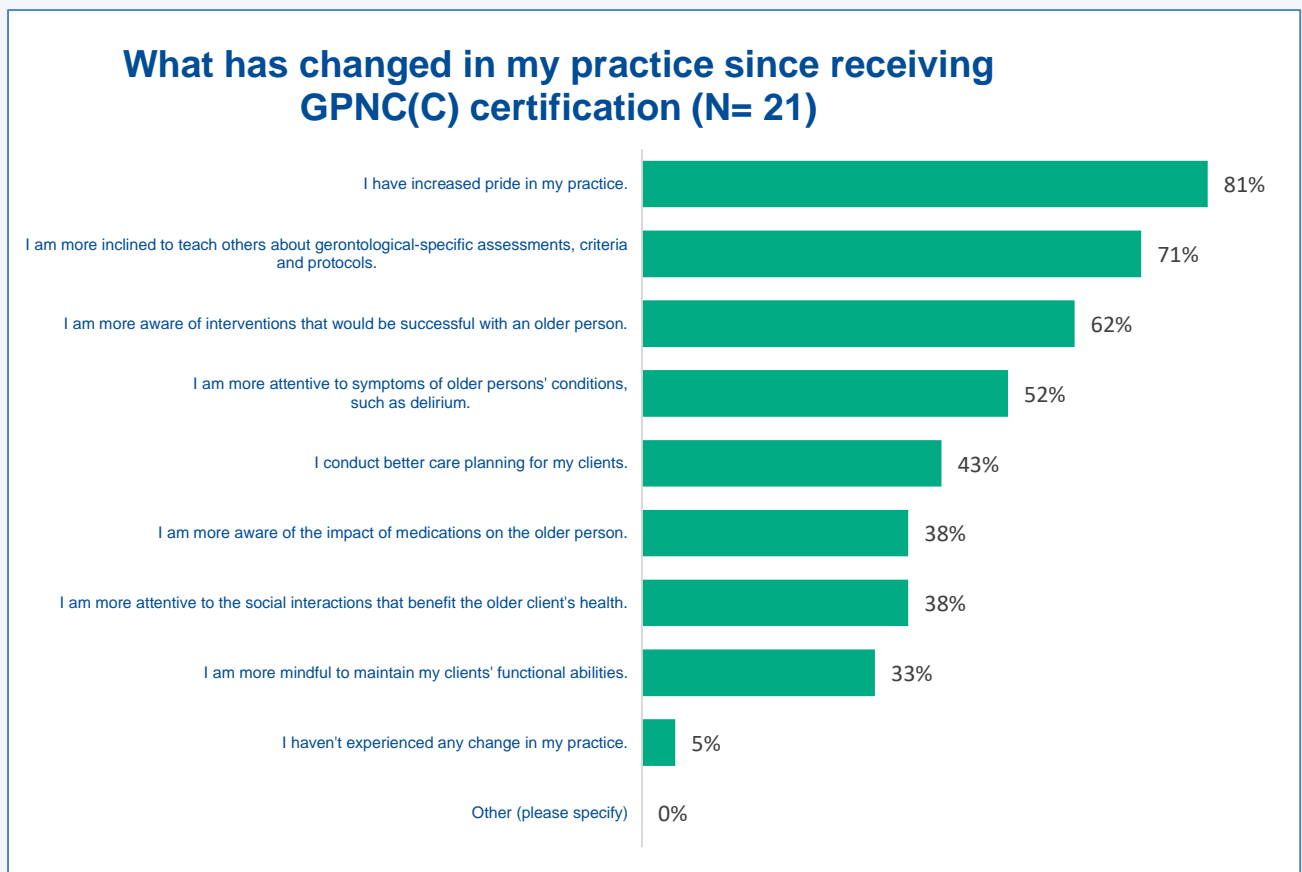


Figure 6: Changes to my practice

Describing a specific practice experience that was impacted by achieving certification was elusive for over 50% (11) of the respondents. For example:

*“It’s not a specific event but in general I feel having this certification has inspired me to work harder to treat geriatric patients with more attention to their specialized needs and with a stronger dedication to constant compassion in even the most challenging situations as I feel I have a duty to exemplify the highest possible standards as a certified nurse in gerontology.”*



However, those respondents without specific practice examples did describe the opportunity certification provides to encourage other LPN/RPNs, to conduct more in-depth medication reviews and to work with specialty populations such as Indigenous elders.

Those that were able to describe specific practice experiences suggested the event created the feeling of being more valued, better integrated and taken more seriously by the inter-professional team, practicing at a higher standard of care for geriatric clients with more active participation in clients' clinical/medication reviews, improved clinical treatment planning recommendations and decisions, and increased confidence teaching clients and families. Of note, while three individuals (directors of care (2) and staff nurse) had yet to experience any recognition or impact on their practice since receiving certification as evidenced by these comments:

*“I feel this certificate may be helpful for someone early in their career or perhaps as an added certification to their resume.”*

*“I have not received any real benefit from a professional standpoint. In my organization, the certificate benefits the RNs to a higher degree. This certificate was really more so for myself than a professional advancement.”*



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Yet they did report experiencing a strengthened professional portfolio, increased pride, increased credibility and confidence and reduced role ambiguity when speaking with formal leaders, caregivers, clients, families, and colleagues such as physicians and registered nurses. Clinically, they reported more awareness of impacts of pharmaceuticals and mindfulness to maintain their clients' functional abilities. As certification holders, they indicated an increased inclination to teach and mentor others about geriatric assessment and treatment protocols, and to speak of the benefits of certification.

Achieving certification is a significant accomplishment and somewhat obliges the recipient to be a mentor and champion for enhancing clinical practice, sharing expertise, and inspiring colleagues. It warrants recognition by colleagues and formal leaders; however, 43% (9) of the examinees indicated that they received no recognition from either party. For those who were recognized, some were reimbursed by their employer for the exam registration fees, received credit in their performance reviews, and are now formally recognized, e.g., asked for advice on clients with complex needs, as a specialist and resource within their organization. Two individuals were the recipients of celebratory events and one individual was congratulated by a colleague.

The 5 most popular methods to sustain specialty knowledge, and hence certification were: workshop/conferences (76%, 16); gain at least 15 hours of activities related to geriatric knowledge (71%, 15) by all methods; e-Learning modules (67%, 14); community of practice meetings (48%, 10); monthly education sessions (38%, 8). Almost a quarter of the participants, teach learning sessions to peers or other health care colleagues to sustain their own knowledge (Figure 8)

## Methods to sustain knowledge since receiving certification (N =21)



Figure 7: Methods to sustain certification

When asked what advice they would provide to an individual interested in pursuing certification, 60% (13) indicated they speak about the process and benefits, and 50% (11) encourage their peers to be courageous with the belief of the need for specialization. Other advice included start studying early, study hard, attend webinars offered by CNA, gain support from your employer, be dedicated, love what you do and believe- “we can make a difference to those who are aging, including ourselves!”

In conclusion, these 21 professionals speak overwhelmingly of experiencing increased confidence, credibility, and pride in their practice since receiving certification. Clinically, they reported more awareness of impacts of pharmaceuticals and mindfulness to maintain their clients’ functional abilities. As certification holders, they indicated an increased inclination to teach and mentor others about geriatric assessment and treatment protocols, and to speak of the benefits of certification. Increased recognition by colleagues and employer would be beneficial.

**“Go for it, we’re definitely a specialty and we can make a difference to those who are aging, including ourselves!”**

## Appendix

Question 10: Please describe a recent experience in your practice where having the GPNC(C) <sup>®</sup> - Gerontology Practical Nurse Certified (C)anada credential impacted your practice and/or the outcome of the client you were serving.		
Respondent	Responses	Tags
1	When asked by another staff member to assess a resident got the history and what was going on with this resident she had been vomiting for days and very lethargic she then went to the hospital diagnosis of very high potassium. She was then admitted to ICU	Assessment
2	I was considered a valuable part of the team when we cared for a client with complex care needs.	Complex needs review
3	I feel more confident when talking to colleague and more assertive when it comes to best practice. It also helped me with being a better supervisor to PSW as i am more understanding of the process therefore more inclined to be patient and teach PSW's.	Confidence
4	I feel more confident in speaking to family members and friends about the elderly	Confidence
5	I am taken more seriously about the older adults.	Credibility
6	Since receiving my credentials I find clients and families are more confident in my assessments and more apt to follow health teaching and recommendations I provide.	Credibility
7	Able to provide education to resident and Family that I felt was better received because of my certification.	Credibility
8	Recently retired, I volunteer for Side by Side, a program for older adults with dementia. I find that the other volunteers look to me for information.	Information source
9	More active participation and education in medication reviews as elderly have different unique challenges with medications.	Med reviews
10	We have successfully decreased our anti psychotics, utilizing the whole interdisciplinary team And engaging in activities with the clients. Less treating uti with antibiotics. confidence	Med reviews - antipsychotics, antibiotics
11	The Certification has provided me opportunities to encourage other RPNs to look at certification	None
12	none	None
13	It has not impacted my practice.	None
14	n/a	None
15	?	None
16	I have seen no impact as to my practice of outcome of a pt since receiving my certification	None
17	None	None
18	X	None
19	I am self employed in Home Care as we I am an instructor in the HCA Program, clinical area in Senior Care, and love it!	None
20	i work in Indigenous health with our elders	None
21	It's not a specific event but in general I feel having this certification has inspired me to work harder to treat geriatric patients with more attention to their specialized needs and with a stronger dedication to constant compassion in even the most challenging situations as I feel I have a duty to exemplify the highest possible standards as a certified nurse in gerontology.	None

Question 11: Please describe the advice that you would give an LPN/RPN looking to complete the gerontology specialty certification?	
Respondents	Responses
1	Do it
2	Go for it!!
3	I would advise that they persevere to obtain certification as it is a tremendous professional accomplishment and source of pride.
4	This is a great way to refresh and focus on the elder adult vs the acutely ill. It helps create an understanding of what the older person could be going through from their perspective with nursing interventions appropriate. The recognition and respect from coworkers like Care aides, RNs, Dr., Dieticians, Etc.
5	Read, ask questions, and attend reviews
6	I feel this certificate may be helpful for someone early in their career or perhaps as an added certification to their resume.
7	It's a great way to improve your own knowledge and to have a specific certification related to working with 65+ year olds.
8	For a lot of LPN's that work in this field we do not get recognized for how experienced we are. This helps give us a little more recognition and other disciplines treat us with a little more respect
9	Do not overthink the questions. Instinctively nurses who work in gerontology already know the best answer.  Read every question and do not second guess yourself
10	Never be afraid to try something new. It doesn't matter how old you are to take courses to learn about the profession you love.
11	Take the challenge, you can do it.
12	?
13	Go for it! We're definitely a specialty and can make a difference to those who are aging, including ourselves!
14	Start studying early and work with your employer to ensure your success!
15	The webinars offered by the CNA are more helpful then reviewing textbooks, as they are concise and up-to-date
16	Able to apply for a leadership role  Shows commitment and passion  Love what you do
17	It's a great investment in your practice and yourself - go for it!
18	Ask your employer if they reimburse the course fee.
19	It takes a certain amount of dedication but is a true honour to be recognized as a certified RPN
20	Encourage my LPN colleagues to try, you can do it.
21	to study hard