



CNOR® Certification: Eligibility and Maintenance Requirement Rationales

The CNOR® credential recognizes perioperative nurses who demonstrate the knowledge, experience, and commitment needed to provide safe and effective care in the operating room. Eligibility criteria for initial certification and recertification are based on industry best practices, input from subject matter experts, and national accreditation standards. Below is a summary of these requirements and the rationale behind them, presented in a clear and accessible format for current and prospective certificants.

Initial Certification

- Hold a current, unrestricted RN license

This confirms the candidate has met legal and educational requirements to practice independently as a registered nurse, including passing the NCLEX exam and completing an accredited program.

- Currently work in perioperative nursing

Active engagement in perioperative practice—whether clinical, educational, administrative, or research—ensures the candidate’s knowledge and skills are current and aligned with the realities of practice.

- Have at least 2 years and 2,400 hours of perioperative RN experience

This timeframe reflects the minimum duration needed to build competence across the wide scope of perioperative responsibilities. It also ensures candidates have post-licensure, real-world experience beyond academic preparation.

- At least 50% of those hours must be in the intraoperative setting

Since over half of the CNOR exam focuses on intraoperative care, this ensures that candidates have relevant, hands-on experience in the operating room before certification.

- Alternate pathway: CFPN®, CST, TS-C, or military equivalent

These credentials represent structured training that overlaps with CNOR content. This path allows early application while still requiring the full 2,400 hours of experience.

Recertification

- Hold an active CNOR® and RN license

Maintaining these confirms the nurse continues to meet practice and legal standards of the profession.

- Currently working in perioperative nursing

Ensures certificants stay connected to the specialty and apply their knowledge in a real-world setting.

- Complete at least 500 perioperative hours in 5 years (250 must relate to intraoperative practice)

This balances flexibility with the need for continued relevance and practice in areas that influence patient outcomes in the OR.

- Volunteer work may count toward practice hours

This supports inclusivity and recognizes the contributions of certificants who serve in community or unpaid clinical roles.

- Complete professional development (300 points or 125 contact hours)

Professional development ensures certificants stay up-to-date with current best practices and continue growing in their specialty.