#### Abstract

**Background:** Specialty certification recognizes individuals with advanced knowledge and skills designed to promote quality patient care, encourage continued personal and professional growth in caring for patients, and enhance the health care institution's recognition for exceptional service.

Objectives: To determine perceived value and perceived challenges and/or barriers to specialist certification among MS certified specialists (MSCSs) who are a) currently MS certified and b) those who's MS certification lapsed; and 2) determine if differences between currently certified MSCSs and those with lapsed MS certification regarding perceived value and challenges and/or barriers to specialist certification.

Design/Methods: The sample consisted of 66 currently certified MSCSs and 18 with lapsed certification.

Scales included: 18-item Perceived Value of Certification Tool (PVCT), 11-item Perceived Challenges and Barriers Scale (PCBS), Overall Satisfaction, and Demographic Form. Data analysis included descriptive, correlation, independent t-tests, factor analysis, and alpha reliability procedures.

**Results:** The sample consisted of 86.2% females, 90.6% Caucasian, with mean age of 49. MS certification specialty areas included Physical Therapists (41.5%), Occupational Therapists (15.9%); and fewer Physician Assistants, Neurologists, Psychologists and Social Workers. Work facility included Outpatient Center (44.2%), Physician's Office (15.1%), Hospital (10.3%), and fewer Rehabilitation Centers, Private Practices, Long Term Care Rehabilitation, and Academic Institutions. Primary service areas included Patient Care (63.2%) and fewer Teaching, Consultation, and Research. Factor analysis of the PVCT yielded four subscales: Personal Value, Employment Value, Practice Standard, and Recognition with alpha reliabilities between .75 and .86 for subscales and .91 for the total scale. Factor analysis of the PCBS yielded three subscales: Practice Irrelevance, No Reward, and Unavailability of preparatory test material with alpha reliabilities ranging between .60 and .86 for subscales and .691 for the total scale. Currently certified MSCSs had significantly higher scores for total PVCT than lapsed MS certification subjects (t= 2.290, p = .025); higher PVCT subscale, Employment Value (t = 2.35, p = .021, and PVCT subscale, Recognition, (t = 3.294, p = .013). No statistically significant differences were observed for total PCBS and its subscales. Reasons cited for lapsed certification were: retirement, no longer worked with MS patients, inconvenience, costs, no rewards, and no close test site. **Conclusion:** Identified specific valued areas by MSCSs and challenges/ barriers to re-certification of MSCS .

## Background

- Multiple sclerosis (MS), an inflammatory demyelinating and autoimmune disorder, is a chronic and progressive condition with various symptoms manifested during its long term course. Patients may experience fatigue, spasticity, depression, and dysfunctional cognition, bladder, bowel, sexual function and others.
- Management of coexisting symptoms requires a MS specialized interdisciplinary team of professional staff consisting of the following: occupational therapist, physical therapist/physiotherapist, registered nurse, speech/language pathologist, recreational therapist, physician assistant, psychologist, social worker, physician, licensed practical/vocational nurse, physical/occupational/rehab/medical assistant and possibly others.
- The Consortium of MS Centers encourages its multidisciplinary team members to avail themselves of specialist certification in MS that reflects specialized knowledge felt to be necessary to provide optimal care to those individuals and families living with MS.
- MS certification for nurses has shown to increase their autonomy, patient assessment and management skills, teaching, research, interdisciplinary collaboration, patient referrals from other disciplines, and consultation with other MS services. Conditions related to dissatisfaction among MS certified nurses included insufficient nursing resources (time, staff, and space); lack recognition of MS certification, inadequate compensation for salary and reimbursement of certification fees and continuing education (Gulick, Halper, & Namey, 2008).
- Assessment of the values and challenges to MS Specialist Certification is needed.

### Purpose

- Determine the perceived value of and perceived challenges and/or barriers to specialist certification among MS specialist certified staff who:
  - Are currently MS certified
  - Allowed their MS specialist certification to lapse
- Determine if differences exist regarding perceived value of and challenges and/or barriers to specialist certification between currently and lapsed MS certified specialist staff.

#### Method

- The sample of current MS certified and those with lapsed MS certification were recruited by CMSC staff.
- Self-report scales were used to obtain data as follows:
- The Perceived Value of Certification Tool (PVCT), an 18-item scale measured the subjects perceived value of MS specialist certification (Sehrist & Berlin, 2006).
- The Challenges and Barriers to Certification (PCBC), an 11-item scale was used to measure perceived challenges and barriers to obtaining specialist certification (Niebuhr & Biel, 2007).
- The Demographic Form sought information regarding MS certification status, gender, age, and work setting
- Overall Satisfaction with MS Specialist Certification, a single item, had anchors from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 6 (extremely satisfied).
- Data analysis included descriptive statistics, independent *t* tests, Pearson correlations, factor analysis of PVCT and PCBC, and scale reliability. Item ratings for the PVCT and PCBC ranged from 0 (no opinion) to 4 (strongly agree). Scale item scores were summed and divided by number of scale items resulting in a score range of 0 to 4 to facilitate comparison between scales and subscales.

### Results

### Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Currently Certified		Certification Lapsed	
	n	%	n	%
Gender: Female Male Missing	59	88.1	16	84.2
	7	10.4	3	15.8
	3	1.5		
MSCS: Physical Therapy Occupational Therapy Physician Assistant Physician Psychology Social Worker Speech/Language Licensed Practical Nurse Missing	32	47.8	3	15.0
	12	17.9		
	5	7.5	1	5.0
	4	6.0	3	15.0
	3	4.5	1	5.0
	2	3.0	1	5.0
	1	1.5		
	1	1.5		
	1	10.4	11	55.0

### Sample Characteristics (cont.)

naracteristic		Currently Certified		Certification Lapsed	
	n	%	n	%	
ork Area:					
Outpatient Center	28	41.8	10	52.5	
Physician's Office	11	16.4	2	10.5	
Hospital	8	11.8	1	5.3	
Multiple Facilities	7	10.5	3	15.9	
Long Term Care Rehabilitation	3	4.5			
Hospital Rehabilitation	2	3.0	2	10.5	
Private Practice	2	3.0			
Academic Institution	2	3.0			
Other: MS Center Programs, Client Homes	4	6.0	1	5.3	
S Service:					
Patient Care	48	71.5	12	63.2	
Teaching	4	6.0			
Consultation	3	4.5	1	5.3	
Multiple Services	8	12.0	2	10.4	
Other: Admin., Research, Program Development	4	6.0	4	21.1	

# Values and Challenges of MS Specialist Certification

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## Eigen Values and Reliability Coefficients for PVCT and PCBS Subscales and Total Scale

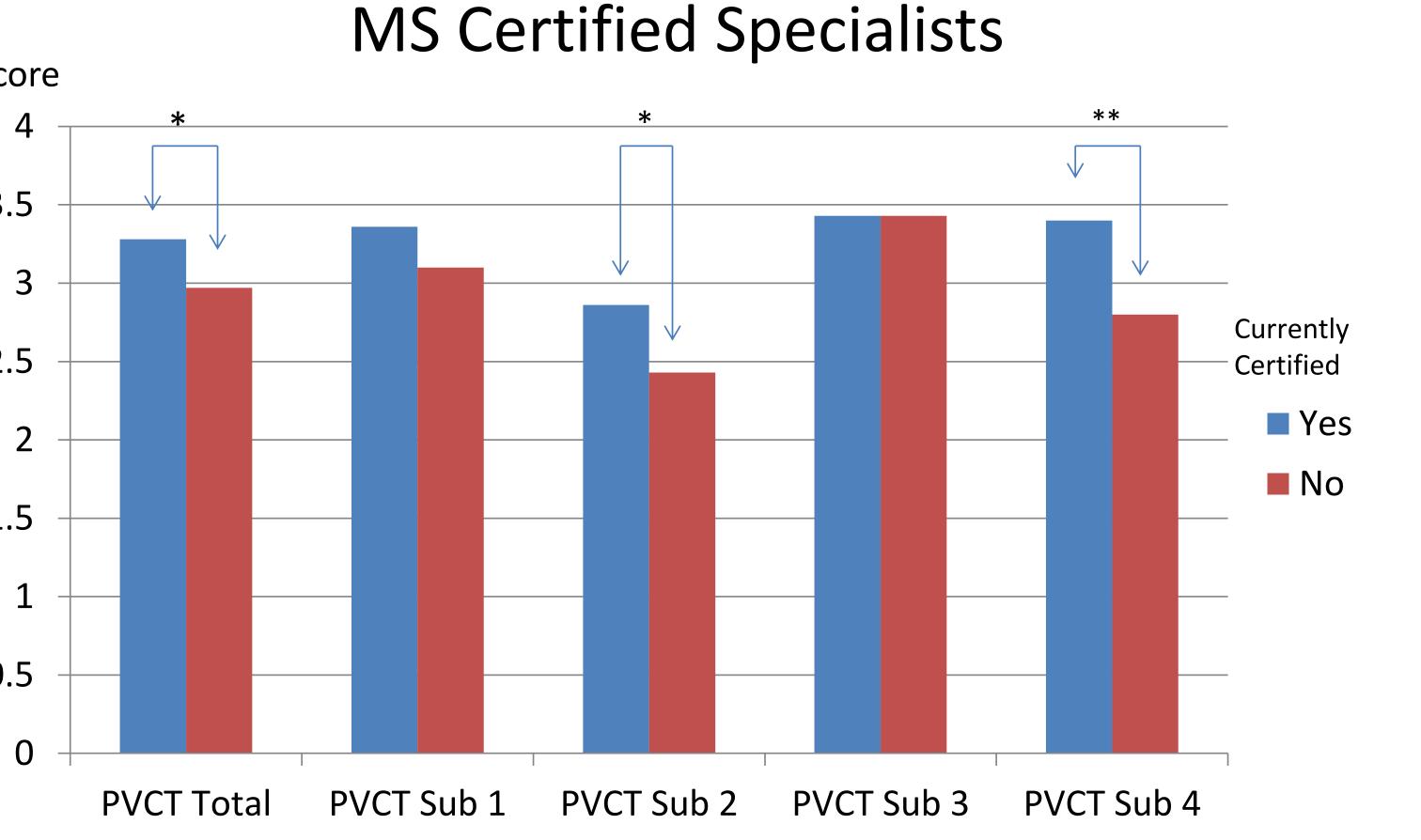
Scale Name and Subscale	Eigen Value	Alpha Reliability
Perceived Value of Certification Tool (PVCT) Total Scale  Subscale 1. Enhanced clinical confidence, satisfaction, autonomy, and accountability	 7.968	.911 .830
Subscale 2. Enhanced professional recognition, confidence, salary, and marketability	1.918	.745
<b>Subscale 3.</b> Validated specialized knowledge, clinical competence, and professional growth	1.249	.815
Subscale 4. Enhanced professional credibility	1.145	.866
Perceived Challenges and Barriers to Certification (PCBC) Total Scale Subscale 1. Failed certification exam, lack interest in certification and irrelevant to one's practice	 2.745	.691 .856
Subscale 2. Cost of exam, lack institutional support and reward Subscale 3. Lack access to prep courses, materials, exam site, and continuing education; test-taking discomfort and high cost	<ul><li>2.393</li><li>1.284</li></ul>	.751 .598

## Descriptive Statistics: PVCT Scale and Subscales by Currency of MS Certification

	Currently Certified		
Scale, Numbered Subscale	Yes	No	
	Mean (sd)	Mean (sd)	
Perceived Value of Certification Tool: Total Scale	3.27 (0.48)	2.97 (0.55)	
1. Enhanced clinical confidence, satisfaction, autonomy, accountability	3.36 (.53)	3.10 (0.62)	
<ol> <li>Enhanced peer and other professional recognition, challenge, confidence, marketability, salary</li> </ol>	2.86 (0.71)	2.43 (0.64)	
3. Validated specialized knowledge, clinical competence, professional growth	3.43 (0.58)	3.43 (0.40)	
4. Enhanced professional credibility, recognition from peers and other health professionals	3.40 (0.63)	2.79 (0.89)	

Note: Currently Certified n = 66, Lapsed Certification n = 18

# Comparison of Perceived Value of Certified Tool: Total Scale and Subscales by Current and Lapsed NAS Certified Specialists

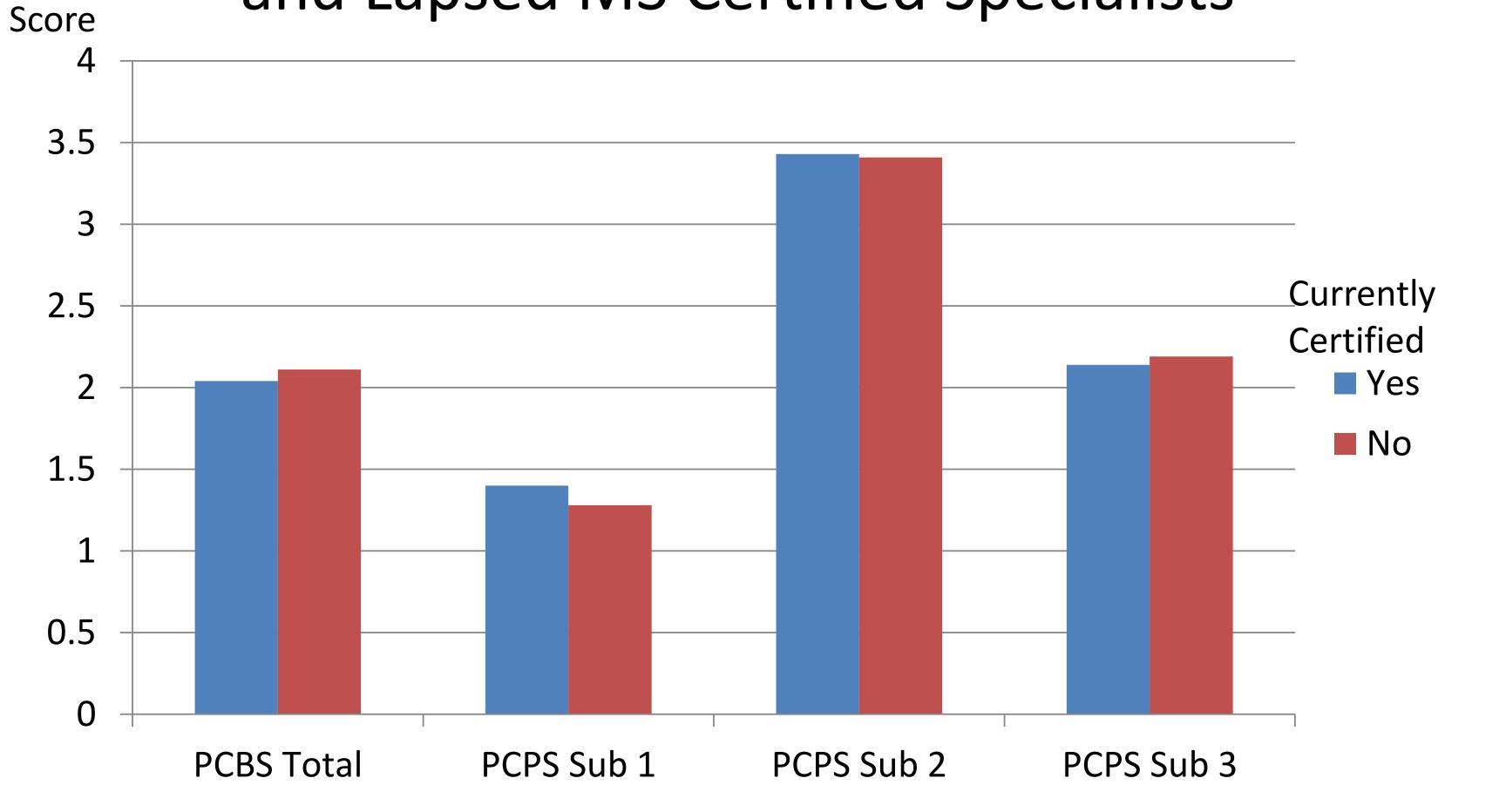


\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

# Descriptive Statistics: PCBS Scale and Subscales by Currency of MS Certification

	<b>Currently Certified</b>		
Scale, Numbered Subscale	Yes	No	
	Mean (sd)	Mean (sd)	
Perceived Challenges and Barriers to Certification Scale: Total Score	2.04 (0.43)	2.11 (0.46)	
<ol> <li>Failed certification exam, lack interest in certification Irrelevant to one's practice</li> </ol>	1.40 (0.72)	1.28 (0.66	
2. Cost of exam, lack institutional support and reward	3.43 (0.61)	3.41 (0.49	
3. Lack access to prep courses, materials, exam site, and continuing education together with test-taking discomfort	2.14 (0.51)	2.19 (0.69	

# Comparison of Perceived Challenges and Barriers Total Scale and Subscales by Currently and Lapsed MS Certified Specialists



No statistically significant differences between currently and lapsed MS Specialists

# Pearson Correlations Between PVCT, PCBS, and Overall Satisfaction by Certification Group

	PVCT	PCBS	Overall Satisfaction
PVCT (Perceived Value of Certification Tool)	1	.539*	.643**
PCBS (Perceived Challenges and Barriers to Certification)	170	1	.279
Overall Satisfaction Scale	.603**	323*	1

\*p < .05, \*\*p < .01

Note: Lower left diagonal values represent currently certified MSCS individuals. Upper right diagonal values represent lapsed certified MSCS individuals.

#### Discussion

- The sample consisted mostly of physical therapists and occupational therapists with few physician assistants, physicians, psychologists, social workers, and licensed practical nurses.
- The majority of participants worked in outpatient centers followed by physician's office, hospital, rehabilitation centers, and academic institutions.
- Most study participants' type of service was patient care followed by teaching, consultation, administration, research, and program development.
- The *Perceived Value of Certification Tool* (PVCT) demonstrated excellent reliability for the total and four factored subscales.

The PVCT demonstrated statistically significant differences between currently and

- lapsed MS certified specialists for the total scale and two subscales.

   Currently certified MS specialists perceived greater employer recognition,
- Currently certified MS specialists perceived greater employer recognition, consumer confidence, marketability, and salary than lapsed certification MS specialists.
- Currently certified MS specialists perceived greater professional credibility and recognition from peers and other health professionals than lapsed certification MS specialists.

#### Conclusion

- Specific values resulting from MS specialist certification are identified that can be used to encourage re-certification.
- Specific challenges and barriers to MS specialist certification are identified that can be used by CMSC to initiate activities that address challenges and barriers to obtaining and maintaining MS specialist certification.
- Some of the reasons cited by study participants for lapsed re-certification included retirement, no longer worked with MS patients, inconvenience of test sites, costs, and no reward from employer.
- The PVCT scale and subscales have very good reliability and PCBS scale and subscales have variable reliabilities.

### References

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