



Med-Surg Nurses on the Rise

**Lifting Up Lifelong Learners
Through Evidence-Based Education and
Expert-Designed Courses**

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Executive Summary

The Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSUN) seeks to address the need of its members and all med-surg nurses to build robust clinical knowledge and acquire or expand transferable skills they can implement at the point of patient care and beyond. To achieve this goal, AMSUN has conducted comprehensive third-party research, members’ needs assessments, and in-depth interviews to determine gaps in knowledge and identify, prioritize, and fulfill the needs of clinical nurses.

To that end, AMSUN is launching the Elevate Series, an evidence-based series of educational programs that allows nurses to meet continuing education requirements while learning next-level skills and competencies and gaining practical, real-world knowledge that can be applied immediately. At the same time, they will have the opportunity to earn contact hours that will help them meet certification or state licensure requirements. Clinical Leadership Development Program (CLDP): Essential Leadership Competencies for Nurses at Every Level and the Behavioral Health Certificate Program are the first two Elevate courses available to med-surg nurses and answer critical needs within the field.

In this paper, we will outline the value, benefits, and expected learning outcomes for each program, with insights from AMSUN leadership, board members, research, and active med-surg nurses. Our hope is that the reader will gain a new perspective on the state of learning in the med-surg field as well as renewed enthusiasm and motivation to continue their journey of lifelong learning.



OBJECTIVE

We will outline the value, benefits, and expected learning outcomes for each program, with insights from AMSUN leadership, board members, research, and active med-surg nurses.

Higher Learning for a Higher Calling

The AMSN Elevate Series is an expert-designed, evidence-based series of educational programs that seeks to answer the most pressing needs of med-surg nurses in clinical practice, including:

- Opportunities to build next-level skills in core disciplines related to med-surg nursing
- Courses that help nurses meet ongoing educational requirements and earn contact hours/nursing continuing professional development (NCPD)
- A combination of practical and theoretical knowledge that can be immediately implemented
- Lifelong learning that is meaningful and impactful, rather than solely focused on passive in-person or e-learning
- Applied learning with direct, measurable impact on nurses, institutions, and patients



AMSN understands that as one of the largest nursing specialties, the needs and goals of individual med-surg nurses will vary. However, it is our desire to lift up the field of med-surg nursing, recognize those who have chosen to build their career around it, and support them as they continue to pursue confidence, competency, and provide quality care.

This paper covers the three initial assessment-based courses offered in the Elevate series.

CLDP: Essential Leadership Competencies for Nurses at Every Level

A 10-module, in-depth course in clinical leadership designed not for management roles, but for the clinical nurse.

Behavioral Health Certificate Program

A critical needs course designed to equip med-surg nurses with practical skills in evaluating, communicating with, and treating med-surg patients with behavioral health needs, giving them the confidence and capability to handle unknown and uncertain situations.

DEI

AMSN has prioritized improving patient care and the nurse work environment through diversity, equity, and inclusion, and we hope others in health care will embrace this initiative with us. AMSN is adding a 6-module e-learning course to a larger initiative on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in nursing and health care. This initiative includes the needs of patients as well as health care providers. The certificate program covers general DEI societal and health care information, as well as detailed learning around five traditionally marginalized groups.

We believe that among med-surg nurses, learning is more than an obligation; it's a passion to know more, to perform at a higher level, and to deliver the best quality of patient care. In offering the Elevate Series, we aim to support nurses as they rise up in their careers, lift up their institutions, and elevate the field of med-surg nursing.

The State of Learning for the Clinical Nurse

The Med-Surg Nursing Field in 2021

Med-surg nursing is a rapidly growing area of specialization within the greater nursing field. There are currently more than 4.3 million registered nurses in the U.S. Close to 60% work in a general medical-surgical hospital setting and even more med-surg nurses work in the community and other settings. This makes med-surg nursing one of the largest nursing specialties in the nation.

With the nursing industry expected to grow 7% by 2029 — faster than any other occupation — med-surg nurses require up-to-the-minute, evidence-based educational opportunities to keep them on the leading edge of clinical practice.

Identifying the Gaps

Continuing education is critical for all med-surg nurses, but the previous year has called into sharp relief the gaps in learning for nurses both established in their careers, and those just entering the field. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated many of the issues med-surg nurses face in seeking high-level educational opportunities, including:

Lack of Clinical Training

With the onset of the pandemic, many higher learning institutions were forced to cancel clinical rotations. Student nurses approaching graduation found their options for in-person clinical practice extremely limited. This deficit in clinical opportunities put them at a disadvantage as they entered the workforce without the practical experience of their peers and colleagues.

Lack of On-Site Education

As conferences, seminars, and other in-person learning events were canceled, many nurses found themselves struggling to make the shift to digital or e-learning, and many organizations faced challenges in adapting their

educational programming to online platforms. This left a significant gap in access to expert-designed, evidence-based learning.

The Solution

AMSN has designed the Elevate Series as an online, self-paced, asynchronous collection of courses that allows nurses to learn and engage from wherever they are, whenever it works in their busy schedules. Courses have been selected to focus on filling critical gaps and elevating nurses up to the next level in clinical practice.



WHAT MEMBERS ARE SAYING:

“Despite a stressful year, I’ve felt very supported by AMSN. Thank you for having my back!”

Med-surg Learning by the Numbers

In a survey conducted by AMSN, we assessed the needs of med-surg nurses and collected data on how they perceive AMSN and the value we provide. Here are some of the most intriguing numbers we found regarding continuing education:



Ranked #1

Professional Development



90%

Say they perceive AMSN as valuable to their career



“Nursing changes quickly, but usually doesn’t have quite as major a change as COVID has brought. I think that that has been an eye-opener of understanding how quickly we need to adapt to major changes in healthcare.”

Jacqueline Savalle

AMSN Emerging Professional BOD director

MOST IMPORTANT AMSN STRATEGIC GOAL



65%

Say continuing education and professional development is one of the biggest reasons they became a member



51%

Say continuing to learn and teach is the best part of being a med-surg nurse



69%

Rate contact hours the most important educational offering from AMSN

Facing more complex cases, carrying a heavier patient load, and feeling the weight of greater responsibility due to nursing shortages, med-surg nurses are more vulnerable to burnout and physical/mental exhaustion than ever before. This burden on time and resources leaves little room to pursue continuing education or prioritize learning.

It All Adds Up to This

Online, asynchronous learning offers nurses the flexibility to pursue their educational goals on their own time, when and where they have the capacity to do so. More importantly, the in-depth, evidence-based programming provided by AMSN gives them actionable learning they can apply on the job immediately. This combination of learning on their own terms, while gaining practical competency and training, provides measurable and meaningful value to their careers, their organizations, and their patients.

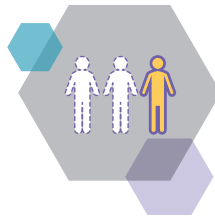
OTHER BARRIERS MED-SURG NURSES FACE

How these barriers impact continuing education



67%

Cite increased patient acuity



56%

Cite staffing shortages



53%

Cite nurse-to-patient ratios

Benefits of the AMSN Series:

Raising the bar in continuing med-surg education

Med-surg nurses need to be at peak performance at all times. The Elevate Series will help them climb higher and achieve more in their careers. Participants can expect to see benefits derived from the series methodology and delivery, as well as benefits to individual nurses, med-surg teams, and institutions.

Methodology

Elevate Series courses are built on learning modules that break the curriculum down into manageable segments. Assessment-based certificate programs break the mold of traditional online learning courses that center more around earning contact hours. Instead, our courses are interactive, engaging, and, most importantly, applicable to your career — right now. While contact hours can be earned by completing the

course, the true measure of success is in the ways it impacts the care you deliver. Learning is measured through an assessment prior to completion. To signify the knowledge and insight you have gained, after successful completion of the course, you will receive an assessment-based certificate and a digital badge you can use to highlight your expertise.

Methodology Benefits:


- Demonstrates mastery of a particular domain of knowledge
- Awards those who complete the course a “micro-credential” they can share with employers, colleagues, and networks
- Leverages the reputation and trustworthiness of the AMSN name to add legitimacy

It’s important to remember that an assessment-based certificate is NOT the same as certification. Here’s why:

	Certification	Certificate
Purpose	To recognize individuals that meet established knowledge, skills and competencies	To build capacity and recognition of a specialty area of practice or set of skills
Format	Assesses knowledge, skills, and/or competencies previously acquired	Often includes instruction and training
Goal	To validate the participant’s competency through a valid and reliable standardized assessment	To acquire specific knowledge, skills and competencies
What is Measured	Measures baseline competencies and to differentiate professionals separately from a specific learning program	Measures intended learning outcomes; directly linked with the educational event
Scope	Broad	Narrow and specific
Designation Awarded	Credential individual can use after their name; certificate and/or digital badge	Certificate of mastery awarded at completion of program. This is not a certificate of completion but rather a reflection of learning achieved.
Renewal Required	Yes, credential time limited and must be renewed at set intervals	No, no expiry of credential

Delivery

It was important to AMSN when designing the Elevate Series courses to create educational programs that were flexible, accessible, and meaningful. We recognize the challenges med-surg nurses face and worked to craft programs that would help nurses overcome these obstacles and make continued education a positive experience rather than a chore. Though courses were in development prior to the COVID-19 crisis, we recognize the specific challenges the pandemic has presented, and we hope that the launch of our virtual, asynchronous learning opportunities will help address these barriers as well.



Delivery Benefits:

- Asynchronous learning that flexes to fit the needs of the nurse
- Online courses that are engaging and interactive as a simpler, easier alternative to in-person learning
- Self-paced curriculum that fits in a nurse's hectic schedule

Users

The Elevate Series was designed for med-surg nurses at all levels. Most courses are offered with no prerequisites. However, it's important to note that to provide optimal value, our courses go well beyond most standard continuing education offerings. They are deep dives into core curriculum that will deliver immediate results through actionable, practical skill-building.



WHAT MEMBERS ARE SAYING:

"I love being a member of AMSN and all the opportunities it presents me with. I highly encourage any [med-surg] nurse to get involved and take advantage of all the opportunities."

User Benefits:



To the Individual:

- Deeper knowledge on key subject matter within the med-surg field
- Coursework designed by experts with experience in a clinical setting
- Practical learning that can be applied right away
- Development of confidence and capability



To the Team:

- Increased level of collaboration between peers and colleagues
- Cross-team motivation and encouragement
- High performance as a team
- Better communication and higher overall standards



To the Institution:

- Greater efficiency and efficacy from med-surg teams
- Lower rates of readmission
- Elevated institutional performance
- Better outcomes for patients and a higher success rate at the organizational level



Logistics & Process

How to cut the clutter and rise to the occasion

How will I fit continuing education into my busy life?

We know, it isn't easy. That's why we put hundreds of hours into researching, designing, and creating programs that would fit seamlessly into your lifestyle. Asynchronous, self-paced online learning is the new standard in continuing education because of its accessibility and adaptability. Our courses are flexible to fit in your schedule and set you up for success.

How do I get started?

It's easy. Simply log into your AMSN account **(if you aren't a member, create an account for free)**, and browse our Career Development page. Look for the Elevate Series course you'd like to take and sign up. Pay the fee, and access your course when and where you want. From there, complete the course on your timeline and finish the assessment to earn your certificate.

How much time do I need to devote to this?

Our courses vary, but most take 5-16 hours to complete. You may find you breeze through modules you already have experience in, while others require more time to dig into the information. Because modules can be completed on your timeline, you can fit them in before or after work, on the weekends, or even over breaks. Modules do not need to be completed in one sitting, so you can always pause and come back to it.

What happens after I complete a course?

Once you've finished a course, you'll receive an assessment-based certificate. This digital badge can be added to your resume, LinkedIn, or email signature — anywhere you want to show off your hard-earned certificate. CEs you've earned through the course will be automatically added to your AMSN contact hour tracker for easy management.

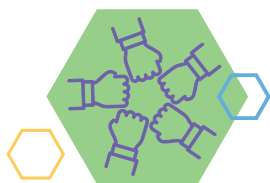
How long can I access the course, and can it expire?

Your course will never expire. Once you've purchased it, the content is yours to keep. Take as much time as you need to complete your course, and revisit it to refresh your knowledge any time you like.

Clinical Leadership Development Program:

Essential Leadership Competencies for Nurses at Every Level

Do I need leadership skills if I don't want to go into nurse management? It's a question many med-surg nurses have asked, and the answer is a resounding YES. Clinical nurses, by nature, are leaders in their organizations, and all can benefit from a strong foundation of on-the-job leadership competencies, even when they aren't managing other nurses or looking to fill a leadership role.



We spoke with Dr. Terry Jones, a former ICU nurse and academic researcher, who conducted a study on the impact of leadership training for med-surg nurses in non-leadership positions. She compiled a group of med-surg nurses who took the CLDP course and reported back on their results. Here are some of her findings:

Nurses Think Leadership Has to Come With a Title

According to Dr. Jones, "Nurses have difficulty interpreting what leadership behaviors mean in the context of what they do every day. Inspiring a shared vision is not about setting the strategic plan for the entire organization, but it's setting a plan for your shift."

Nurses Are Worried About Pushing Back Against Leadership

Dr. Jones says nurses should be empowered to take a stand on matters of process they believe need to be changed. "We do such a good job in the patient safety world of teaching people about risk, and so I think staff nurses see risk as a bad thing. And certainly, in terms of patient safety, it is. But challenging the process is a good thing. It's appropriate to take those kinds of risks. Challenging the process for the frontline nurse is really all about performance improvement."

The CLDP Course Builds Leadership Skills in Med-Surg Nurses

According to Dr. Jones, even in the midst of COVID-19, when respondents on the front line were overwhelmed, crunched for time, and focused on other priorities, the Clinical

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Leadership Development Program course did have a positive impact on their leadership competencies. She says, "Based on self-report, people increase their leadership practices after completing all of those modules. The study was statistically significant. The average difference in the pre- and post-scores was about 18 points. It was much more significant than actually anticipated. So what we can say is that completion of those modules makes a difference."

Leadership Isn't a Priority Without Measurable Value

Dr. Jones states, "People are more likely to engage in continuing professional development if they see the functional value of it. If I'm a staff nurse, and I don't see leadership as part of my role, I'm not likely to engage in leadership development. They're going to go with those things that they perceive as being most directly relevant to what they do every day."

CLDP: Essential Leadership Competencies for Nurses at Every Level addresses these issues outlined by Dr. Jones, and it provides nurses with the platform they need to develop leadership skills they can put into practice in their daily routine.

AMSN Elevate Series Behavioral Health Certificate

Addressing the mental health needs of patients and nurses

1 in 5 adults

in the U.S. battles a mental health disorder and the epidemic was only exacerbated by COVID-19. All med-surg nurses will find themselves in situations where they will be treating patients who suffer from behavioral health issues. All the while, they may be experiencing their own struggles due to fear, burnout, and fallout from the trauma of the last year.



The Behavioral Health Certificate from AMSN Elevate is an assessment-based certificate program that delves into the practical matters of interacting with and treating patients experiencing behavioral health issues in addition to their physical health concerns. Jennifer Kennedy MSN, RN, SMSRN, CNE, CNE-cl, NPD-BC serves as the treasurer on the AMSN board of directors. She spoke with us about the importance of a program like the AMSN Behavioral Health Certificate.

Don't all nurses learn about behavioral health during their training? Why is this so necessary now?

Jennifer: Yes, when we're in school, we learn about behavioral health, but it's not the behavioral health the nurses are dealing with in the hospital, or in acute care centers. We learned about all the disease processes, and how to talk to a patient with behavioral health issues, but we aren't taught how to take that knowledge and apply it on the job.

Where are the gaps in med-surg nursing education regarding behavioral health?

Jennifer: We really need to gear the education to say, "Okay, here's your regular med-surg patient. Now they have an additional behavioral health issue." How do you handle both of those together and create a good experience for the patient and for the nurse?

How has COVID-19 complicated the issue of treating behavioral health patients?

Jennifer: The increase in isolation and patients not being able to have their families present

with them. Many times, when you have a patient with behavioral health issues, you have family members stay in the room to support them. With COVID-19, we had no visitors. So it was literally the nurse and the patient, and that created an increased demand on the nurse.



20% Of nurses reported increased violence on the job in 2020

A survey conducted in late 2020 showed a disturbing trend — incidents of violence against nurses, typically from patients with behavioral health issues, were on the rise.

These acts of violence were attributed to the pandemic, but also to other challenges med-surg nurses face, like staff shortages and increased acuity and patient population.

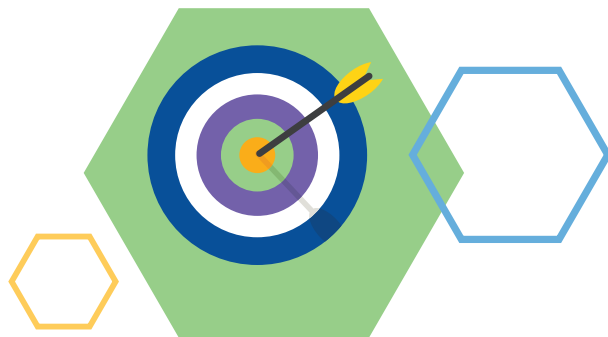
The Behavioral Health Certificate Program aims to counter these shocking numbers by equipping med-surg nurses with the skills they need to leave their anxiety at the door and interact with patients confidently and compassionately.

About AMSN

The Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses (AMSN) is the only specialty nursing organization dedicated to the practice of medical-surgical nursing. Founded in 1991 with the goal of meeting the rapidly evolving needs of the med-surg industry, AMSN remains committed to achieving the highest level of clinical and professional performance that assures the public of the highest level of cost-effective, quality patient care by our membership.

Our Mission

Our mission is to be a dynamic community of medical-surgical nurses that are committed to quality patient care through professional development, certification, scholarship, and advocacy.



How We Deliver on It

We are here to support career development for med-surg nurses, which is why we created the AMSN Elevate Series. Our dedication to the professional development of med-surg nurses is unconditional and unwavering. As the field of med-surg nursing faces consistent evolution in the needs of nurses, institutions, and patients, we are here to provide leading-edge, evidence-based education and training that will keep them at the top of their game.

We are here to lift them up so they can in turn elevate themselves and the profession of med-surg nursing.

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