REGISTERED NURSES and licensed practical nurses join professional nursing organizations for many reasons. For example, some join to learn what’s going on and stay current in their field or specialty. Others want to network or enjoy the peer recognition that comes from being an active member of a major organization. Nurses may join a general organization, such as the American Nurses Association, a specialty group, such as the Emergency Nurses Association, or a state nursing association—or one of each. Let’s take a look at some of the advantages of joining a professional nursing organization.

• **Education:** Science and technology change rapidly—and you need to keep up with the changes that affect health care. Like state licensing boards, many specialty certification boards require you to take continuing education (CE) courses to stay up-to-date in your practice. Some of these boards even offer CE activities to members at reduced prices.

• **Annual conventions:** As a member of a professional organization, you’ll get notices announcing major conventions that you may be able to attend at a discount rate. Making professional contacts is a big draw at these conventions, where you’ll meet other nurses in your specialty.

• **Networking:** As a member of a professional association, you’ll have plenty of other networking opportunities besides connecting with other health care professionals at national, state, or local conventions. For example, you’ll probably have access to online chats or forums at your associations’ Web site. Not only can you network with your peers and other professionals, but you can also hear how others are handling some of the same issues you face.

• **Certification:** Many professional organizations offer certification. Becoming certified demonstrates your commitment to excellence in your practice.

• **Targeted products and resources:** When you join a professional organization, you may get discounts to obtain online CE, newsletters, certification review materials, and much more. Some nursing organizations offer members discounts on auto, life, and professional liability insurance and feature special credit card offers. Many nursing organizations offer members an official journal that may contain peer-reviewed clinical articles and research relevant to the specialty.

• **Career assistance:** When you’re searching for a new job, look to your association’s career center for openings, advice, and opportunities. In fact, keep an eye on that information periodically, whether you’re job searching or not, to stay in touch with the latest trends in your specialty. Review job openings for salaries and benefits so you know current earning potentials.

• **Web sites:** Practically all nursing associations have Web sites you can explore. Typically, they offer general information about the association that anyone can access, as well as member-only areas with restricted access.

With so many rewards awaiting you as a member of a professional nursing organization, what are you waiting for? Join one now!

Doris Greggs-McQuilkin is past-president of the Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses.

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**Sampling of professional organizations online**

- Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses, [http://www.medsurgnurse.org](http://www.medsurgnurse.org)
- American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, [http://www.aacn.org](http://www.aacn.org)
- American Association of Neuroscience Nurses, [http://www.aann.org](http://www.aann.org)
- American College of Nurse-Midwives, [http://www.acnm.org](http://www.acnm.org)
- American Holistic Nurses Association, [http://www.ahna.org](http://www.ahna.org)
- American Nurses Association, [http://www.nursingworld.org](http://www.nursingworld.org)
- American Psychiatric Nurses Association, [http://www.apna.org](http://www.apna.org)
- Emergency Nurses Association, [http://www.ena.org](http://www.ena.org)
- National Association of Orthopaedic Nurses, [http://www.orthonurse.org](http://www.orthonurse.org)
- Oncology Nursing Society, [http://www.ons.org](http://www.ons.org)
- Sigma Theta Tau International, [http://www.nursingsociety.org](http://www.nursingsociety.org)