

Implementation of a Standardized, Organizational Approach to Transition From Academics to Practice: *A Case-Based Discussion*

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The journey to excellence in healthcare is a path that requires a constantly cultivated environment. Paying attention to and adapting this environment is key to sustaining competency and consistency, 2 important factors in delivery of safe, quality nursing

care. For the new graduate registered nurse (RN), ensuring a nurturing environment for transition from academia to practice is essential if sustainability of excellence in healthcare is to be achieved—the goal of hospitals and nursing practices across the United States.

Concurrently, the process to achieve and maintain Magnet® designation is a reflection of a healthcare organization's commitment to professional nursing practice. For many organizations, creating a culture that aligns with the tenets of Magnet provides a foundation for nursing excellence for the work environment and clinical practice. "Recognition as a Magnet hospital by the American Nurses Association Credentialing Center (ANCC) is a marker of distinction—the gold standard for excellence in nursing practice and the work environment," said Mickey L. Parsons, PhD, MHA, RN, FAAN, professor, Graduate Administration Program, University of Texas Health Science Center, School of Nursing. Magnet is the goal of many hospitals across the United States and worldwide; however, even more than recognition, sustainability of Magnet status may be a larger challenge for hospital leadership.¹ Perhaps more important than achieving the initial designation of excellence, hospitals must continue the work required to sustain this prestigious recognition. Although Magnet status is well accepted as the gold standard for excellence in nursing practice, not all hospitals choose to pursue the rigors of the Magnet process. Whether or not a hospital seeks Magnet designation, it may be assumed that all organizations work to develop and maintain a high standard of excellence.

Healthcare organizations know that to achieve optimal patient outcomes and clinical excellence, they must have strong nursing representation on their teams. Clinical excellence cannot be attained unless the new nursing talent within organizations is transitioned in a supportive, welcoming environment. Unfortunately, because of RN staffing shortages and cost-cutting situations driven by reduced lengths of stay for patients and reimbursement challenges, new graduate nurses may be forced to move into patient care staffing positions much quicker than they previously did, oftentimes limiting the time needed to ensure a safe transition to practice. There is a notable lack of standardization for on-boarding new graduate nurses, which results in a lack of confidence and competence, insecurity in delegation and decision making, and a lack of understanding of hospital expectations.² This lack of role transition all too often results in high turnover and a greater potential for diminished quality and safety in patient care.³ The response from organizational leadership must be to arm their nursing workforce with the tools needed to transition new graduates in an environment that ensures a strong foundation to support professional growth and quality patient care. Tools that guarantee robust transitional training and education for new graduate nurses are essential if hospitals are to ensure achievement and sustainability of excellence.

TRANSITIONING THE NEW GRADUATE RN

Even though newly licensed RNs satisfy the legal and professional requirements to enter practice, studies have reported that many new graduate nurses lack the clinical skills needed to provide safe, high-quality patient care.⁴ New nurses often find themselves concerned about their own lack of experience and training, and worry about their inability to make serious decisions and provide safe, skilled patient care. Many new graduate nurses do not feel confident that they can meet

the performance expectations of their healthcare employers. If new graduate nurses feel this way, how do the nursing leaders feel? In a 2009 survey by the Advisory Board Company, 10% of hospital and health systems nurse executives believed that their new graduate nurses were essentially unprepared to provide safe care.² The successful transition for new graduate nurses from education to practice is a critical challenge facing hospitals and nursing organizations today. Although nurse educators in healthcare continue to design programs to support new graduate nurses, there is a lack of consistency across the board. Inclusion of the critical elements necessary for successful transition—focused on safe, quality patient care and developing the professional role of the RN—needs to be available to these novice nurses.

NEW GRADUATE RN RESIDENCIES

Will the implementation of a new graduate nurse residency in a hospital ensure a patient-focused, healthy environment that supports a culture of clinical excellence? Implementation of an RN residency program contributes to a drastic change in culture for a healthcare organization. Historically, physicians and almost every other direct patient care provider are required to successfully complete an internship or residency prior to independent practice. Newly licensed RNs do not. If hospitals and nursing practices wish to ensure a culture of excellence in their facilities, leaders and administrators must be innovative and open to transformation. Nurse managers and hospital administrators must become advocates of evidence-based practices such as an RN residency program and put metrics in place to measure the outcomes of skilled service and quality patient care.

Prior to implementing an RN residency, hospitals often have many challenges that reflect the concerns of healthcare providers in general such as: staffing shortages, low morale issues among overworked nurses, not enough training and education for nurses, and high turnover.

An RN residency program offers a curriculum that addresses the priority learning needs of new graduate nurses during the transition period between school and the first year of practice. The program focuses on educational initiatives extending beyond basic unit-specific skills and practices, and solidifies the preceptorship concept. A robust RN residency program raises the competency bar high enough for nursing organizations to achieve a sustained culture of excellence in any healthcare facility. In addition, in alignment with many of the goals of Magnet, an RN residency contributes to the attainment of exemplary professional practice, new knowledge, innovations and improvements, structural empowerment, and quality empirical outcomes.

CASE STUDY

RN Residency Program Installed in South Florida Healthcare System

This case study represents a large, urban, south Florida healthcare system of 7 standalone medical facilities and numerous ambulatory care centers, all located in ethnically

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