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## Magnet Recognition Program for Nursing Executives

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## Magnet Recognition Program for Nursing Excellence

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Healthcare organizations in the United States face many burgeoning issues – changes in technology, negative press regarding patient safety, lower reimbursements and escalating costs, and the ongoing national nursing shortage. Some organizations are more effective than others in identifying strategies to appropriately cope with these issues. Now, more than ever, we must learn from our peers and focus our attention on that evidence that has proven successful.

One evidence-based program is the American Nurses Credentialing Center's (ANCC) Magnet Recognition Program for nursing excellence. This program applies research, initiated in the 1980s by the American Academy of Nurses (AAN), to present day working situations. AAN nurse researchers observed how, in the same geographic areas, several hospitals suffered soaring nurse vacancy rates, while others experienced low, stable rates. Hospitals with low vacancy rates were selected and referred to as "magnet hospitals" because of their ability to attract and retain nurses. Research at magnet hospitals recognized improved clinical outcomes and enhanced patient and staff satisfaction.<sup>1</sup> Based on these studies, the American Nurses Association (ANA) developed a set of standards to guide nursing practice in both patient care and organizational leadership.<sup>2</sup>

In 1994, the ANCC introduced the prestigious, evidence-based Magnet Recognition Program to "recognize health care organizations that provide the very best in nursing care and uphold the tradition within nursing that supports professional nursing practice. The program also provides a vehicle for the dissemination of successful practices and strategies among nursing systems."<sup>3</sup>

Presently 81 healthcare organizations in the United States and one hospital in the United Kingdom hold this recognition. The voluntary credentialing process evolved, not only to include measurement of compliance with standards, but also to demonstrate incorporation of "forces of magnetism" into nursing practice. These forces relate to leadership qualities, "voice" and empowerment for the staff nurse, support for education and professional development, and strong collegial relationships with all clinical departments. The Magnet Recognition Program is a rigorous process. Statistics show almost one-third of organizations undertaking magnet recognition fail to achieve accreditation.<sup>4</sup>

There are three major steps to magnet recognition: application, documentation and on-site appraisal.

**Application** is not entered into casually. To determine magnet potential and implementation strategies, most healthcare organizations must perform a gap analysis to compare their nursing policies, procedures and practices with requirements and standards of the Magnet Recognition Program. When applying for magnet status, the organization indicates the date it will submit documentation that identifies its "best practices" in nursing, demonstrates compliance with standards, and evidences the forces of magnetism.

**Documentation** must be sent to ANCC a minimum of one year from application to a maximum of two years. If the application period exceeds the two-year maximum, or is not accepted by the ANCC, the process ends at that point. The organization must reapply and wait a minimum of one year for reconsideration.

**On-site appraisal.** If documentation is accepted, the ANCC will send nurse reviewers to the organization to validate the documents and interview staff nurses and key leaders. For the duration of the review period, documentation must be kept open for public comment, usually in the hospital library or lobby. The ANA also requests public comment about the healthcare organization on their website, [www.nursingworld.org](http://www.nursingworld.org).

ANCC representatives report the most common areas in need of strengthening are those related to diversity awareness, collegiality, research and staff voice. Organizations often take several years to complete their "journey." The acute hospitals that comprise Main Line Health -- Bryn Mawr, Lankenau and Paoli -- have begun the magnet journey under the direction of Chief Nursing Officer, Barbara Tachovsky, RN, MSN, and entity nursing vice presidents. This effort enmeshes and enhances the system's goals of service excellence and patient safety.

Magnet recognition is renewable every four years. Most organizations apply for recertification because nursing practice continues to develop with benefits similar to the initial magnet hospitals -- dramatic decreases in nurse vacancy and turnover and consistently improved nurse and patient satisfaction rates. One dramatic example of the power of magnet recognition is St. Joseph's Hospital Health Center in Syracuse, NY, which reported a drop by 10% in the nurse vacancy rate and an increase in physician employment inquiries within two months of obtaining the recognition.<sup>3</sup> The September 2003 edition of the popular magazine, *Reader's Digest*, recommends selecting a hospital with magnet status as one strategy to assure the best possible nursing care.

Striving toward magnet recognition, utilizing ANA standards of care and performance as the framework for nursing practice, and espousing the forces of magnetism appears to be a valid indicator of excellence in nursing care that cannot be ignored.<sup>1</sup>

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## About the Author

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