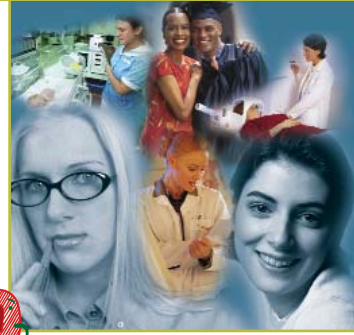


MAGNET STATUS ATTRACTS METTLE



by Margaret Hawke

Magnet status translates into a workplace that values nursing and promotes excellence...

Magnet hospitals are a beacon for nurses looking for a quality institution in which to practice. Hospitals that achieve Magnet recognition display the fact proudly in their nursing ads, and there's good reason — Magnet status doesn't come easily. Hospitals

must work hard, prove a deep commitment to nursing, and often undergo major organizational change to meet the strict requirements.

The Birth of an Idea

In the early 1980s, a small group of nursing leaders sat down to brainstorm solutions to that decade's nursing shortage, and one fact became apparent — some hospitals managed to recruit and retain nurses despite the exodus from acute care. "We began to ask why certain hospitals were able to maintain their staff more than others," says Margaret McClure, RN, EdD, FAAN, immediate president of the American Academy of Nursing (AAN), professor at New York University, and a member of the original task force.

That AAN panel sparked a study of 41 hospitals identified as facilities that were able to draw and hold nurses. "We used the word 'magnet' to describe these hospitals," says McClure, "because we were looking at what attracted and retained nurses." In all of the hospitals studied, characteristics supportive of nursing

practice were evident. The research, "Magnet Hospitals: Attraction and Retention of Professional Nurses," written by Dr. McClure, was published in 1983.

Studies continued through the rest of the decade and into the early '90s. In 1994, the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) launched the Magnet Recognition Program, which had a slow start. "At the time, it was thought that there were enough nurses, so there wasn't the heightened interest in Magnet status," says McClure. "It was expensive, and administrators thought, 'Why do it if you don't need it?'"

Magnet Comes of Age

At the turn of the 21st century, however, all that changed. Faced with a daunting nursing shortage, hospitals recognized Magnet status as the powerful recruiting tool it is today. "There's a definite connection between the nursing shortage and Magnet status," says Ada Sue Hinshaw, RN, PhD, FAAN, dean of the University of Michigan School of Nursing, Ann Arbor. "Magnet hospitals build a culture of safety for patients and staff. Thus, they tend not to be as short

on nurses as other hospitals."

Experienced RNs aren't the only ones who recognize that Magnet status translates into a workplace that values nursing and promotes excellence. "We use Magnet criteria in education now to teach nursing students what to look for in a workplace," says Hinshaw. The American Association of the Colleges of Nursing has published a pamphlet that explains the questions a new graduate should ask during an interview. "These questions are based on the characteristics of Magnet hospitals," says Hinshaw.





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Hospitals that can't attain official Magnet status, McClure believes, can still benefit from the concept. "There are principles within the Magnet literature that are applicable to everyone," she says. "Hospitals can implement the principles embedded in the philosophy."

The Future of Magnet Hospitals

Eighty-two hospitals in the U.S. currently have earned Magnet recognition, and the future "will be interesting to watch," says McClure, who believes the number of Magnet hospitals across the country will increase, leading to improvement in the practice environment and quality of care. "The challenge will be to manage these large numbers of institutions to ensure we maintain the high standards."

It's important to note that when a hospital wins Magnet designation, it's not for life. "You're required to

Not for Everyone

McClure stresses that Magnet status isn't for every hospital. "For some facilities, there are hurdles," she explains. Some smaller institutions, for example, can't meet certain

criteria, such as research. "Working toward magnet status involves considerable expense — having the right staff, time, and energy to complete this sophisticated process. This translates into dollars."

WHAT THE MAGNET AWARD MEANS

- Recognizes nurses' worth
- Serves as a major tool in nursing recruitment and retention
- Provides a competitive advantage
- Enhances nursing care
- Improves staff morale
- Draws highly qualified physicians
- Promotes and reinforces positive collaborative relationships
- Creates a "Magnet culture"
- Improves patient outcomes

Source: Facts about Magnet Hospitals. JCAHO website. Available at: www.jcaho.org/news+room/press+kits/facts+about+magnet+hospitals.htm. (Accessed October 9.)

maintain that status through regular reports and a periodic re-visit," says McClure. "It's an investment, not a flash in the pan." Facilities can lose Magnet status. This year, she notes, two hospitals failed to keep their designation.

In the future, Hinshaw believes, consumers will become aware of what Magnet status means, we will see increased advertising as a marketing tool for patients, and more health care professionals will seek employment at Magnet hospitals." On Hinshaw's wish list is the hope that eventually there will be a federal program providing incentives to encourage Magnet or Magnet-type environments.

In 2002, the first health care facility outside the US won Magnet recognition. Recently, McClure taught a workshop on Magnet status in England, where one hospital has already achieved the designation. "It's taken on a life

of its own since the 80's when we sat in a conference room and came up with that first study," says McClure. "We thought it would have an impact, but never realized it would become a major program with international scope." ■

resources

www.nсна.org/career/hosp_mag.asp

NSNA's web site features a listing of magnet hospitals. Check out the Career Center.

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