HR Excellence Is Nursing Excellence:
How Talent Management Supports the Magnet Recognition Program®

A coveted distinction attained by only 6-7% of U.S. hospitals each year, the Magnet Recognition Program® is a big deal for nurses and the staff who support them. The program was launched in 1990 with the purpose of promoting quality, identifying excellence, and disseminating best practices in the delivery of nursing services. It’s an esteemed designation awarded by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), and it’s available to both hospitals and long-term care organizations around the world. Magnet® designation is granted for four years, and the process of arriving at this designation can be a multi-year journey as well.

But, when keeping up with all of the work required in a traditional hospital setting is already taxing your busy staff, why pursue Magnet status on top of everything else? Research has shown that institutions who gain this distinction have committed to developing and maintaining a lasting culture of excellence that’s aligned with their hospital's strategic goals.
Understanding all that goes into Magnet designation can seem overwhelming, but if you understand the framework it’s based on — The Forces of Magnetism — you’ll be well-prepared for the extensive nature of the review process, and understand exactly what makes Magnet organizations so special.

In this white paper, we’ll take a look at the five model components that make up the values of the Magnet Recognition Program, and examine how these key components are closely tied to HR best practices related to recruitment, performance management, and employee learning. Plus, we’ll give you some recommendations for how to strengthen your existing HR processes from the inside out using performance management and eLearning programs designed to leverage the strengths of your organization.

Let’s take a closer look at these components, and how strong HR practices, like ongoing professional development and a consistent performance management process can help establish this environment where nursing professionals truly feel like they can do their best work.

5 Key Components of the Magnet Recognition Program:

1. **Transformational Leadership.** Addresses vision, clinical knowledge, and expertise in nursing as well as creates the environments and systems needed to realize that vision.

2. **Structural Empowerment.** Addresses the professional environment by reflecting community partnerships and relationships; Also empowers staff to achieve organizational goals and outcomes.

3. **Exemplary Professional Practice.** Addresses professional development by reflecting comprehensive understanding of the role nursing plays in a healthcare organization.

4. **New Knowledge, Innovation, and Improvements.** Involves the continuous process of designing and defining systems and practices around nursing.

5. **Empirical Quality Results.** Addresses the collection of data, creation of quality indicators, the observation of national benchmarks, as well as research and implementation of best practices around the nursing role.

When an organization has these five components in place, they will be well on their way not only to achieving Magnet distinction, but also creating a stronger workplace for their clinical nursing staff.

In a 2015 interview, Linda Lewis, MSA, RN, NEA-BC, Executive Vice President and Chief ANCC Officer for the American Nursing Credentialing Center, reflected on the origins of the Magnet program and the rationale for its creation: “If you go back through the history of Magnet, research was done in the mid-1980s when there was the really severe nursing crisis in staffing and in talent, and the research gave us the foundation of Magnet today. The environment drives retention of highly qualified nurses and attracts nurses who want to work in an environment where they are empowered, entrusted, and respected.”
Transformational Leadership:
Management Style and Hiring Best Practices

HR processes are closely tied to the component of Transformational Leadership. A common theme at Magnet-recognized hospitals is that HR and nursing management work collaboratively on interviewing and hiring staff that embody the organization’s values and culture. Hiring nursing staff who are a good cultural fit means that your staff will be more likely to grow with your organization and ultimately transform your hospital into a place where nurses want to remain and thrive. The result not only equates to nursing excellence, but also higher retention and lower costs associated with high turnover.

Many HR teams have also incorporated staff with a nursing background onto their teams. “If you are a Magnet-recognized organization, you truly need a nurse working in HR,” said Deborah Slayden, Director of Workforce Development and Strategy at VCU Health System in Richmond, Virginia. “Individuals with a nursing background bring a different perspective to Human Resources and the nursing staff is more open to new ideas when they come from a person who understands their world.”

To find nursing candidates who will best fit the culture, consider these best practices:

• **Hire for fit.** When new hires share the same values as the rest of the team, it’s easier to get them up to speed quickly. As a result, many Magnet organizations hire for cultural fit. “When we interview, we look for personal attributes and values,” commented Michelle Link, MSN, BS, RN, Director of Nursing, Professional Practice at Bronson Healthcare in Kalamazoo, Michigan. “It’s more important to hire for cultural fit — we can teach people clinical competencies once they join the organization.”

• **Interview training.** It’s common for employees to participate in the interview process, but not everyone is inherently a strong interviewer. To help staff participate in the hiring process, both CaroMont Regional Medical Center in Gastonia, North Carolina and Bronson Healthcare offer classes to help employees learn interviewing techniques.

• **Conduct peer interviews.** Peer interviews are a great way to learn more about nursing candidates’ attitudes about customer service, diversity, and critical thinking. Behavioral interview questions are one approach for gathering this information. “We ask candidates about specific examples from their life and work experiences, with the goal of discovering how they would respond in certain situations,” said Melinda Gevaart, MSN, RN, NE-BC, RT(R)(CV), Magnet Program Director & Nursing Manager at Bronson Healthcare.

• **Ask candidates to shadow nurses.** Several units at VCU Health System ask nursing candidates to shadow staff as part of the interview process. The process benefits both applicants and the hiring teams. “Shadowing gives candidates a feel for the pulse of the unit. It also offers the nurses insight into how engaged the candidate is in patient care. They learn a lot from the types of questions the candidate asks,” noted Teri Kuttenkuler, Human Resources Service Line Director.
Structural Empowerment: The Importance of Personnel Policies, Programs, and Professional Development

Two of The Forces of Magnetism associated with Structural Empowerment relate closely to HR practices: Personnel Policies and Programs, and Professional Development. While looking closely at the nuts and bolts of your HR policies may seem tedious, the results can be transformative.

A 2011 study found that nurses in Magnet hospitals are 18% less likely to be dissatisfied with their jobs than nurses in non-Magnet hospitals. Far from coincidence, this discrepancy points to the difference in organizations where the needs of nursing staff are truly valued and taken into account. Magnet-recognized institutions must prove that they have creative and flexible staffing models that support a safe and healthy work environment and ensure delivery of quality of care.

Two innovative hiring practices that support these types of staffing models include the use of pre-hire behavioral assessments and “test drive” days. At Akron Children’s Hospital, their hiring team begins the process with behavioral assessments that focus on the organization’s spirit of service competencies. “The assessment results help us determine what areas we want to discuss with a candidate when he or she comes in for an interview,” said Tessa Schmidt, Employment Manager.

To help ensure that nursing candidates find the department where they will have the best fit, the HR team at Bronson Healthcare developed a creative approach to interviewing that they call “test drive” days. Pre-screened candidates are invited into the hospital on a particular day. The unit managers talk to the group about the different areas of the hospital and then conduct roundtable interviews. “The managers indicate which nursing candidates they are interested in and that’s cross-referenced with the areas the applicants are interested in. The nurse managers love it,” said Michelle Link.

In the area of Professional Development, Magnet-recognized organizations strive to provide nurses with regular performance evaluations to set professional goals that are mutually agreed upon by managers and staff.

Hospitals have developed several best practices related to performance management which support principles of the Magnet Recognition Program:

- **Goal cascades.** Magnet is closely aligned to goal setting as part of the evaluation process. Bronson Methodist Hospital uses goal cascades to ensure that everyone in the organization is working toward the same overarching objectives. The executives set goals first for the organization, then committees set priorities for the hospital, directors create a nursing plan for the year, and staff establish gainshare goals for their departments, as well as personal goals.
• **Self-evaluations.** Both VCU Health System and CaroMont Regional Medical Center ask employees to evaluate their own performance. “We ask nurses to focus on their knowledge, behaviors, technical skills, and communication as they work on their self-evaluations,” said Faye Clements, Manager, Nursing Administrative Support and Magnet Designation at CaroMont.

• **360 degree evaluations.** Bronson Methodist Hospital is experimenting with 360 degree reviews for the nursing leadership team. HR and the nursing team worked with educational services to develop the questions. After the evaluations were done, people met with mentors who coached them on how to interpret the results. Each employee who participated in the pilot created a personal development plan which was supported by books, tools, and other resources. The program may be expanded to other areas of the organization.

• **Peer reviews.** To augment self-evaluations, nurses at CaroMont Regional Medical Center also participate in peer reviews. The manager picks one or two peers to evaluate an employee, and the employee also selects one to two peers to do a review. The evaluations are done electronically and results are shared with the employees.

• **Positive reinforcement focused on processes.** Akron Children’s Hospital uses positive reinforcement to motivate employees. This approach is complemented by the hospital’s “Just Culture” that focuses on processes, not people. “We want to provide a safe environment for employees to provide feedback,” said Schmidt. “We don’t blame people for problems with processes.”

• **Real-time feedback.** At Magnet-recognized hospitals, nurse leaders work daily to improve important skills among their teams. At Akron Children’s Hospital, each unit holds a daily “blue belt” meeting. These five to ten minute huddles are used to discuss issues related to quality, safety, or staffing. “Issues either get resolved at the unit level, or they are escalated to huddles at higher levels. These blue belt meetings are a proactive way to learn about potential problems and they increase visibility and accessibility among the staff,” said Meghan Weese, Magnet Coordinator.

• **Shared governance structures.** At CaroMont Regional Medical Center, new employees are asked to select a shared governance council at the unit level within 90 days of hire. “In shared governance councils, some nurses serve as co-chairs. They learn different management skills, such as creating agendas, facilitating meetings, taking minutes, and engaging in planning,” said Clements. Akron Children’s Hospital also uses a shared governance structure to engage nurses by involving them in decision making. “The people who are closest to the point of care are in the best position to make decisions,” noted Weese.
Exemplary Professional Practice:
Going Beyond the Minimum for Compliance

Magnet-recognized hospitals go beyond the minimum training requirements outlined by The Joint Commission and provide opportunities for all nurses to attend continuing education. Tuition reimbursement programs are one common employee benefit, but Magnet organizations also use a wide variety of other programs to ensure that the nursing staff can advance professionally.

• **Provide resources to stay current.** Most Magnet-recognized organizations invest in a program like Lippincott’s Procedures & Skills which provides evidence-based information on how and why to perform more than 1,300 nursing skills across every specialty. These programs can be offered through an organization’s learning management system, so it’s easy for nurses to access the information and use it as a reference when working through other training activities.

• **Create career ladders.** Not all nurses want to go into management. Career ladders are designed to provide a path for advancement to individuals with expertise in bedside care. All of the Magnet-recognized hospitals interviewed offer staff some form of nursing or clinical career ladder. At Bronson Methodist Hospital, nurses create a portfolio of work focused around a particular professional goal. When that goal is attained, the nurse receives a monetary bonus and continuing education credits. CaroMont Regional Medical Center augmented its career ladder program to include research in the upper levels — at Level 4 research is optional, but at Level 5 it is required.
New Knowledge, Innovation, and Improvements
How eLearning Programs Can Support Key Components

One major tool in achieving this goal is the adoption of a quality eLearning program that allows access to individualized professional development in tandem with hands on, cooperative training opportunities.

Here’s what ongoing learning can look like at some of the highest achieving healthcare organizations:

- **Select and use a learning management systems (LMS).** Through online learning management solutions, organizations can deliver knowledge to large audiences in a more economical way than through classroom teaching. At Bronson Healthcare, administrators facilitate the use of the learning management system and are always available for consultation and assistance. All online courses, in-services, and offerings are managed through the LMS, which allows tracking and automatic email reminders to staff. Bronson’s LMS also feeds into its performance management system, so transcripts can be easily obtained for regulatory reviews and annual evaluation validations. Thanks to the online delivery of courses, it’s possible for Bronson Methodist Hospital to offer nurses more educational opportunities to help them meet Magnet standards.

- **Leadership training.** In addition to providing training for individual contributors, Magnet-recognized organizations offer training for nurses who want to pursue a management career. Examples of leadership training include courses on crucial conversations, “Just Culture,” and TeamSTEPPS — a teamwork system developed jointly by the Department of Defense and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to improve institutional collaboration and communication relating to patient safety.

Creating and maintaining a culture in which nurses are given opportunities for growth and recognition can have lasting effects for your organization. In a recent article on what it means to transition into life “after Magnet,” Maria Ducharme, MS, RN, NE-BC, Chief Nursing Officer at The Miriam in Providence, Rhode Island noted that: “Magnet is not just an accreditation to be earned, it is a way of being…to be successful you need to live it 24/7. If you don’t, you aren’t being true to what the designation means. Every member of your team must live the principles and celebrate the achievements while continuing to strive for superior performance and the high patient outcomes that are the goals of Magnet.”

And how do you ensure that you’re reaching these performance goals?
Empirical Quality Results: Using Effective Performance Management Systems

Attaining status as a Magnet-recognized hospital raises the bar for healthcare organizations in many different functional areas, which translates to serious results for patients, nursing professionals, and your organization’s bottom line. Reaching your performance goals can create incredible benefits for both the patients you serve, and the nurses who serve them. Organizations with better work environments for nursing staff had better outcomes for patients, including lower mortality rates and better surgical outcomes.

One of the most important ways that HR teams can contribute to these successes is by facilitating a robust performance management process to keep nursing staff focused on meeting — and exceeding — both individual and organizational performance goals. Conducting these evaluations with a paper-based system can be time consuming and inefficient. An automated performance management system can make the process more efficient for managers, employees, and HR.

Here are four considerations when selecting a performance management system to support the Magnet Recognition Program:

- **Self-assessments.** When employees participate in self-assessments, it increases their involvement in the evaluation process. Systems with an online self-assessment component strengthen employees’ engagement with their own professional development.

- **Goal setting.** Many organizations require managers and employees to work collaboratively to develop employee performance goals. It’s important that employee efforts are aligned with management priorities. Robust performance management systems allow organizations to include their mission and values in a collaborative goals definition process.

- **Peer reviews.** Peer reviews are commonly used at Magnet-recognized organizations to ensure that nurses have a comprehensive understanding of their strengths and opportunities for further professional development. Performance management systems with multi-rater assessments make it easy to widen input to evaluations and help make assessments more trustworthy among employees.

- **Positive coaching.** Positive feedback is a proven way to reinforce desired behaviors and motivate behavior changes. Capturing real-time feedback on paper and saving it until review time, however, is burdensome and unreliable. Consider looking for a performance management system that includes an online coaching journal where employee feedback can be recorded quickly and consistently.
Conclusion

Attaining and maintaining status as a Magnet-recognized organization requires a culture of innovation and continuous improvement in professional nursing care. One of the ultimate goals of Magnet-recognized organizations is to deliver the best possible patient care, and to achieve this objective, healthcare organizations must recruit and retain nurses who embrace the organization’s values and the spirit of Magnet. One surefire way to do this is to implement progressive HR practices and talent management technology to better leverage the power of your existing nursing team, while helping both veteran and new hires continuously improve their practice and alignment with a culture of nursing excellence.

Sources
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3201819/
http://nursing.advanceweb.com/Archives/ArticleArchives/After-Magnet.aspx
About HealthcareSource

With more than 3,000 healthcare clients, HealthcareSource® is the leading provider of talent management solutions for the healthcare industry. The HealthcareSource Quality Talent Suite™ helps healthcare organizations build a Patient-Centered Workforce™ by selecting, aligning, continuously developing, and retaining highly-engaged people. The company’s cloud-based platform of software, content, services and analytics includes applicant tracking, reference checking, behavioral and skills-based competency assessments, compensation analysis, performance and learning management, eLearning courseware, education and advisory services. A private company focused exclusively on the healthcare industry, HealthcareSource consistently earns high marks for client satisfaction and retention. HealthcareSource has been regularly ranked as a leader by KLAS Research for Talent Management, in addition to recognition in Healthcare Informatics 100, Modern Healthcare’s “Healthcare’s Hottest,” Inc. 500|5000, Deloitte Technology Fast 500, and Becker’s “150 Great Places to Work in Healthcare” list.