

Magnet[®] hospitals are attracted to



THE AMERICAN NURSES Credentialing Center (ANCC) specifically developed the Magnet Recognition Program[®] to recognize healthcare organizations that provide nursing excellence.¹ Hospitals that achieve Magnet status enjoy a reputation of improved patient outcomes. Additionally, the competition for scarce healthcare dollars has driven many hospitals to explore marketing strategies, including designation as a Magnet facility, to promote their organizations.²

Exemplary professional practice and transformational leadership are two of the five “Magnet model components” that represent specific forces of Magnetism. To qualify for Magnet status, 75% of nurse managers in the organization must hold a bachelor’s of science in nursing (BSN) or graduate degree in nursing. Hospitals seeking or renewing Magnet status after January 1, 2013, must meet the new requirement that 100% of nurse managers have a BSN or graduate degree in nursing.³

For Magnet recognition, ANCC doesn’t specifically mandate a BSN

but what’s in it

the BSN

for direct care nurses. However, in a typical Magnet facility, 48.4% of direct care nurses hold a BSN.⁴ Overall, prelicensure BSN programs graduate only one-third of the total RN workforce.⁵ As a result of a tighter job market and ever-increasing healthcare system requirements, many nurses are returning to school for their BSN degree.⁶

Because earning a BSN requires a significant investment of time and money, many RNs legitimately question the value of the degree and demand more than simple job retention in return for their effort. This article will explore the many benefits to nurses who earn a BSN.

Adding up the advantages

For starters, BSN graduates can expect a financial return on their investment. Level of education is consistently listed as one of the factors positively influencing nursing salaries. In a 2010 survey of RNs, BSN-prepared nurses earned higher average incomes than diploma or associate degree nurses.⁷ Furthermore, job opportunities expand

for the BSN graduate, and the BSN is the entry-level degree to MSN or DNP programs for advanced practice.

Hospitals and nursing organizations are beginning to pay attention to a growing body of evidence that suggests that BSN graduates provide safer patient care than nurses with less education. A recent study by Van den Heede et al. found that increasing the number of BSN-prepared nurses on the unit resulted in a decrease in hospital mortality.⁸

In her landmark study, Dr. Linda Aiken found that “a 10% increase in the proportion of hospital staff nurses with baccalaureate degrees is associated with a 5% decline in mortality following common surgical procedures.”⁹ A follow-up study confirmed these findings; BSN-prepared nurses improve patient outcomes.¹⁰

Intangible benefits

As a faculty mentor in a BSN completion program, co-author Janice Hawkins is privileged to watch nurses grow as they progress through the program. Besides opportunities for increased salaries, job growth, and

improved patient care, recent BSN graduates where she teaches report increased confidence as an important benefit.

The BSN curriculum includes general education courses such as English, history, and fine arts as well as nursing courses that emphasize evidence-based practice, leadership and management, nursing theory, wellness, and community nursing. A common theme from BSN graduates was that the degree completion program enhanced their current nursing practice. In her capstone presentation, one student noted, “Before entering this program, I was a good nurse. I now feel that the core competencies taught over the last 2 years have assisted me in becoming a better nurse.”

Anita Shell, nurse manager of a cardiac step-down unit, completed her BSN in August of 2010. Anita writes:

I chose to go back to school to enhance my career opportunities. With my employer seeking Magnet status, I felt pressure to complete my BSN. The BSN program has equipped me with the knowledge and education to be successful in my journey as a healthcare

for nurses?

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professional and leader. The completion program included key competencies such as nursing practice, research, communication, leadership, professionalism, cultural competency, teaching, and critical thinking. These competencies were threaded throughout the program and each one positively influenced my thinking and practice. I realized how important these competencies are in guiding my overall practice.

After completing the BSN program, I'm now able to support my organization on our Magnet journey as a more knowledgeable nurse manager. This journey is a very challenging process. However, the core competencies within the BSN curriculum go hand in hand with the forces of Magnetism.

Anita's comments are typical of new BSN graduates in Janice's facility. In her experience as a faculty mentor in

the RN-to-BSN track, many RNs are skeptical when they enter the program. But by the end of the program, students realize what faculty knew at the beginning of it: the BSN degree changes practice for the better. End-of-program comments from students support this statement (see *Recent BSN graduates reflect on their education*).

The final assignment in the RN-to-BSN program is a presentation reflecting on the successful completion of program objectives. This presentation is often a celebration of achieving a new milestone. Learning about changes that students have implemented in their practice or work environments as a result of the program is very rewarding. These recent graduates agree that they clearly had more to gain from returning to school than simply keeping their jobs.

As more and more healthcare organizations apply for Magnet status, we believe that employment requirements, such as higher education for nurses, will increase. The BSN completion program provides the means to make a great nurse even better. ■

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Recent BSN graduates reflect on their education

- "This increased knowledge has reinforced my belief that nursing is more than administering medications and performing tasks."
- "My practice has changed from the task-oriented delivery of care to theory-driven care based on the standards of care of the profession."
- "The most rewarding outcome has been that I'm able to successfully research best practices and initiate changes at my place of employment."
- "When I was studying to become an RN, I was concerned with memorization, technique, and mostly practical skills. As a BSN candidate, I've learned how to research, teach, communicate, and examine all aspects of an issue."
- "I believe I'm able to communicate my ideas better, due to a greater understanding of healthcare policy, organizational structure, and nursing practice."
- "Now when changes are made, I want to see the evidence to support them."
- "I've learned to consider both patient and the health system. I've become a better team player."
- "I now know how to look at research results and implement changes to my practice or suggest policy changes within my department."
- "I have a greater understanding of the needs of the increasingly diverse patient population and am better prepared to meet their needs."
- "I'm more receptive to change that's initiated by management because I understand the significance of quality outcomes and evidenced-based practices"
- "I've increased the use of standards of practice, professional web sites, and evidenced-based research when considering nursing interventions."