

The Nursing Shortage:

Focus on Improving the Nurse Work Environment

A critical shortage of registered nurses (RN) is being experienced in Florida and throughout the United States and the world. It is widely acknowledged that the shortage is going to escalate before it resolves. Efforts to address the critical need for RNs will require long-term strategies from two perspectives: increased production of new and improved retention of current RNs.

Great effort is being taken to increase the production of new nurses in the State of Florida. Nurse educators are increasing program capacity, introducing new approaches to curriculum design, and working to increase program completion rates. The Florida Legislature created the SUCCEED, FL grants program (first year recipient information can be viewed on the Center's website) funding projects to increase production of new nurses or nurse faculty.

Increased attention must be given to the retention of current RNs, as well as those newly joining the workforce. Nurse employers must create and maintain a healthy nurse work environment, a setting that both attracts new RNs and retains current RNs. The positive impact of increased production of nurses will be compromised if the work environment is negative resulting in the decision to quit the profession.

A healthy nurse work environment is a practice setting that maximizes the health and well-being of nurses, while providing quality patient care. Just as in clinical decision making, it is important that those focusing on creating healthy work environments make the best evidence-based decisions possible. One source for guidance in establishing a healthy work environment is the Magnet Recognition Program (Magnet) developed in the early 1990s by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC), a branch of the American Nurses Association. The Magnet Recognition Program identifies a positive work culture, recognizes excellence in nursing care and demonstrates its importance to quality patient outcomes and the success of the entire health care organization. Magnet

health care organizations recognize nursing as an essential part of the health care institution and not as an isolated entity (ANCC, 2004)

The essence of the Magnet Recognition Program is the Fourteen Forces of Magnetism. The forces epitomize excellence in nursing care and were derived from the original research with magnet hospitals in the early 1980s. The decision to seek Magnet designation is a significant one. The process toward achieving Magnet certification is rigorous, time consuming, and expensive. Not all nurse employment settings have the resources to achieve Magnet status neither do all meet the requirement of being an acute care facility or long-term care setting. However they can implement characteristics of Magnet healthcare organizations found in the Fourteen Forces of Magnetism. Listed below are the forces of magnetism and a brief explanation of each. By implementing changes in the work setting that incorporate some, or all, of these characteristics, the nurse work environment will be improved. The result may be reduced turnover and improved recruitment.

1. Quality of Nursing Leadership

Nurse leaders are perceived as knowledgeable and supportive and advocate on behalf of staff.

2. Organizational structure

Organizational structures are flat with unit-based decision making prevailing. Nursing is well represented in committees throughout the organization.

3. Management Style

A participative management style that encourages and values staff feedback. True participative leaders allow their people to mature and succeed. Nurse leaders are visible, accessible, and committed to effective communication with their staff.

4. Personal Policies and Programs

Competitive salaries and benefits including flexible and creative staffing models and clinical promotional opportunities exist. Rotating shifts are utilized sparingly.

5. Professional Models of Care

Models of care that allow nurses authority and responsibility for the provision of patient care are utilized. Nurses are responsible for the coordination of care, and are accountable for their own practice.

6. Quality of Care

Nurses perceive themselves as providing high quality of care to their patients. Nurses in leadership positions are responsible to develop the environment in which high quality patient care can be achieved. This force includes ethical practice, research and evidence-based practice, and patient safety issues.

7. Quality Improvements

Decisions regarding care improvement processes are data based. Organizations have structures and processes for the measurement of quality and programs for improving the quality of care and services within the organization. Staff nurses participate in the quality improvement process and perceive that the process improves care.

8. Consultation and Resources

Knowledgeable experts including nurse practitioners are utilized. Adequate consultation and other human resources are employed.

9. Autonomy

Nurses are permitted and expected to practice autonomously consistent with professional standards. Nurses utilize independent judgment within a multidisciplinary approach to health care.

10. Community and the Hospital

Organizations that are successful in the recruitment and retention of nurses also maintain a strong community presence. There are strong partnerships between the community and the health care organization.

11. Nurses as Teachers

Nurses incorporate teaching in all aspects of their practice including student nurse interns. Professional nurses are involved in educational activities within the organization and community.

12. Image of Nursing

Nurses are viewed as integral to the hospital's ability to provide patient care services.

13. Interdisciplinary Relationships

Positive interdisciplinary relationships are maintained. A sense of mutual respect is maintained among all disciplines.

14. Professional Development

Significant emphasis is placed on all types of education and professional growth opportunities. Personal and professional growth is encouraged. Opportunities and resources exist for competency-based clinical advancement.

References

American Nurses Credentialing Center (2004). Magnet Recognition Program Application Manual 2005. Silver Spring, MD: American Nurses Credentialing Center