



Why Nursing Research Matters

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Increasingly, nursing research is considered essential to the achievement of high-quality patient care and outcomes. In this month's *Magnet[®] Perspectives* column, we examine the origins of nursing research, its role in creating the Magnet Recognition Program[®], and why a culture of clinical inquiry matters for nurses. This column explores how Magnet hospitals have built upon the foundation of seminal research to advance contemporary standards that address some of the challenges faced by healthcare organizations around the world. We offer strategies for nursing leaders to develop robust research-oriented programs in their organizations.

Nursing research is defined as “systematic inquiry that uses disciplined methods to answer questions or solve problems. The ultimate goal of research is to develop, refine, and expand knowledge.”^{1(p159)} A robust nursing research culture is a hallmark of American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) Magnet[®]-recognized organizations. Research is integrated into clinical and operational processes, and nurses at all levels are encouraged to appropriately explore the safest and best practices for their patients and practice environment.

Knowledge gained through research must be disseminated to the nursing community.²

How Research Has Shaped Nursing

Research has been a part of nursing since at least the 1850s when Florence Nightingale measured illness and infection rates among wounded soldiers in the Crimean War. Her findings led to improved conditions for soldiers and, ultimately, better health for the British population.³ Through the years, research continued to change and shape nursing practice, advancing the effectiveness, efficiency, safety, and timeliness of healthcare, care delivery systems, and performance improvement initiatives.

In fact, nursing research led to the creation of ANCC's Magnet Recognition Program[®]. Four distinguished nurse leaders, Dr Margaret McClure, Dr Muriel Poulin, Dr Margaret Sovie, and Dr Mabel Wandelt, were selected by the American Academy of Nursing to conduct a study of the nursing shortage that plagued the nation in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Specifically, the team sought to identify and describe clinical practice variables at hospitals that attracted and retained well-qualified nurses. However, instead of conducting the standard study, these inquisitive researchers took an innovative approach, as Dr Poulin noted in 2017. “Rather than chronicle what was wrong at hospitals with high nurse turnover, we decided to focus on what was right at hospitals where vacancy and turnover were low,” she said. “We wanted to know, what are the characteristics that shape an environment of excellence?”^{4(p72)} In 1983, Dr Poulin and her colleagues published their groundbreaking study, *Magnet Hospitals: Attraction and Retention of Professional Nurses*.⁵ Their research unearthed data about elements important to nurses in



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their daily jobs, things such as practice autonomy and clinical authority, professional development opportunities, shared decision-making and interdisciplinary relationships, abundant clinical resources, and a commitment to excellence and continuous quality improvement. These elements were considered critical to high nurse satisfaction and retention.⁵

Magnet's Research Prerogative

The most significant outcome of this research was the establishment of ANCC's Magnet Recognition Program in 1990. Now more than 30 years later, the program has become the premier international acknowledgment of nursing excellence in healthcare organizations worldwide. It has spurred research that continues to build on the original foundation. Over the years, nurse scientists have added new insights into the variables involved in the creation of rewarding clinical practice settings.^{6,7}

With research at its core, ANCC's Magnet Recognition Program is a key driver of the nursing profession's expanding culture of clinical inquiry. The program has raised the bar on nursing research, which is now considered essential to the delivery of quality patient care. Nurses in Magnet organizations are encouraged not only to ask questions but also to answer them, propelling hospital-wide improvements that make care safer and more effective. Strong underpinnings

of autonomy, shared governance, transformational leadership, quality improvement, and the imperative to improve patient care have evolved into a broad scope of nursing research since the original nurse researchers conducted their study.

Cultivating a Research Culture

Establishing a research-centric environment requires a sustained commitment to action. To promote a truly integrated program, nursing leaders must ensure that research is an essential component of the governance framework and includes nurses at all levels. A good place to start is with the Professional Practice Model, which gives all nurses a place to bring ideas, lend their voices, and participate in collaborative decision making.⁸ Another successful strategy is to establish structures and resources (such as PhD-prepared nurse scientists), either directly or through academic partnerships, to support clinical nurses who want to explore research questions.⁸

Nursing research must be the foundation of comprehensive, evidence-based clinical practice. Research uses a scientific process to generate new knowledge to answer unresolved questions of importance to the entire healthcare team.⁷ It adds to the knowledge base to improve patient outcomes. Magnet organizations are poised to lead the advancement of nursing science and continue their role as research pacesetters for the nursing profession.

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