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

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. 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 Vanden Heede et al. found that increasing the number of BSN-prepared nurses on the unit resulted in a decrease in hospital mortality.

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." A follow-up study confirmed these findings; BSN-prepared nurses improve patient outcomes.

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.

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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.

REFERENCES