



**Baxter Regional  
Medical Center**

## BAXTER REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER | CASE STUDY

**Headquarters:** Mountain Home, Arkansas

**Community Served:** A 268 private bed non-profit hospital serving 14 rural counties in north-central Arkansas and south-central Missouri including a Level III Trauma Center and Level II Nursery.

**Services:** Interventional Cardiology, CV surgery, Orthopedics, General surgery, Urology, ENT, Obstetrics and Gynecology, Podiatry, Spine surgery, Pediatrics, Adult and Geriatric Psych, Nephrology, Rehabilitation, Gastroenterology, Emergency Services, Home Health, Hospice, Ambulance, Plastics, Interventional Radiology, Pain Services, Oncology, and Pathology.

### CHALLENGES

#### Low engagement and lack of collaboration leads to challenges with recruitment and retention

In any organization where patient safety and quality outcomes are important, generating engaged and empowered nurses is key to long-term success. In a 2010 report entitled *The Future of Nursing*, it is suggested that a planned program for nurses' transition to practice is a smart strategy for reducing turnover during their first year of practice. In addition to impacting patient safety and care consistency, high turnover rates can be costly at an estimated \$40,000 per lost employee<sup>1</sup>.

For Baxter Regional Medical Center, recruitment and retention posed a significant challenge. An analysis by the CNO revealed a significant problem with RN staffing, particularly recruitment of new graduate RNs. Serving a large 14-county rural community severely limited the organization's applicant pool. In addition, there was very little

collaboration with nursing schools as well as deficits in competitive pay and benefits.

"While our deficits in recruiting were a major challenge, we were also facing an uphill battle with retention," said Baxter Regional Medical Center CNO Shannon Nachtigal. "A thorough situational analysis revealed that Baxter was lacking in nurse-leader engagement and interprofessional collaboration as well as experiencing uncivil behaviors between colleagues and deficiencies in our preceptor training."

Recognizing that the root of these challenges could be tied to a disconnect between nurse leadership and the organization's culture, the CNO set out to do a deeper dive into strengthening processes and building a culture of accountability with the hopes of finding a solution to increase engagement and improve performance and outcomes.

### CHALLENGES

- Increase nurse engagement and team work
- Reduce turnover
- Improve recruiting efforts

### SOLUTIONS

- Leveraged a competency-based nurse residency program
- Used team-based leadership strategies
- Created a cultural transformation

### RESULTS

- Improved engagement yielding lower turnover
- Increased peer respect and collaboration
- Able to recruit higher quality candidates

<sup>1</sup> Institute of Medicine. *The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press; 2010

### Leveraging a competency-based nurse residency program to improve engagement and satisfaction

Without accountability, employees can feel undervalued which leads to frustration, low morale and ultimately poor job performance and high turnover. For the team at Baxter, the first step to creating a more engaging and empowering workplace was to implement processes that would hold leaders accountable. Through this effort, the organization was able to make the significant step of demonstrating a commitment to the nursing staff, resulting in a unified team.

One such tactic was the implementation of Versant's standardized, competency-based residency program that supports the transition of new RNs to practice at Baxter Regional Medical Center. While there was already a preceptor program in place, feedback from preceptors and new graduate RNs indicated that there was too much variation among preceptors, yielding negative satisfaction results from both groups.

"Voicing their frustrations over the inconsistency of our internal preceptor program, two of my nurse leaders approached me with a request to take on a program overhaul. Based solely upon knowledge they obtained at a Versant® user conference, these nurses were inspired to take the lead and create a brand-new standardized program," said Nachtigal.



With the full support of the CNO and complete buy-in from Baxter's leadership team, Versant's Preceptor Role Development Program was implemented and customized to the needs of Baxter.

"In order to create consistency in the program, we implemented specialized training to ensure that all of our preceptors meet specific competency requirements and are appropriately trained in leadership," said Nachtigal. "In response to the feedback we received indicating that our preceptors didn't feel they were being appropriately recognized for their work, we integrated more leadership support and implemented an 'Exceptional Preceptor Award.' RN Residents recognize the hard work and dedication provided by preceptors by nominating those that truly made a positive impact on their orientation experience. Two preceptors are bestowed the Exceptional Preceptor Award annually."

Based on participant evaluation and feedback, the new graduate transition to practice program was also enhanced to better fit Baxter's specific needs and challenges. Events such as welcoming activities, structured and supportive immersion, celebratory functions at residency milestones and recognition ceremonies upon completion of the Versant residency were implemented to enhance the new graduate's experience and enculturation into the hospital and the community.

“Throughout the first year of practice, we provide a high-level of support for our new RNs to enhance their competency and engagement. We deploy self-care and professional development components as well as ensure they have access to their nurse leaders and preceptors through standing scheduled meetings. The End of Immersion milestone is celebrated with breakfast with the CNO. Each resident is pinned by their leader as they become an alumni resident. The alumni residents then, in turn, pin the new residents to welcome them into the new Versant RN Resident Cohort,” added Nachtigal.

### Including physicians as subject experts

At Baxter Regional Medical Center, the CNO and the medical staff work together to ensure that nurses feel empowered. Physicians are included as subject matter experts in the Versant residency program, helping new graduates better understand processes and procedures.

“We have found that including our physicians in the residency training program not only creates goodwill and respect between doctors and nurses, but also helps improve efficiencies over the long term as our nurses learn proper protocol and procedures early on during their residency,” said Nachtigal.

Baxter has also stepped up its game when it comes to recruiting from nursing schools. Through an academic-practice partnership, Baxter’s nurse leadership begins engaging future nurses while they are still in school as a way to build relationships between student nurses and the hospital as a potential employer.

“Through our partnerships with nursing schools, we are empowering our existing nurse leaders to control the future of their team by enabling them to interact and engage with potential team members. We are also increasing our awareness with nursing students by taking an active interest in their progress with the hopes that they will consider Baxter as an employer of choice when they are ready to graduate and begin their practice,” said Nachtigal.



## Greater engagement yields low turnover, greater respect and an increase in highly qualified candidates

Versant's competency-based structure and team-based leadership strategies has improved Baxter's new RN recruitment, retention, performance and engagement. Baxter experienced a cultural transformation that has improved satisfaction with new RNs and improved engagement throughout the entire workforce.

Baxter has found that empowered nurses are engaged nurses who not only help create better patient outcomes but become positive change agents, serving as role models and leaders across the entire organization.

With Versant's competency-based residency program, Baxter employee satisfaction has improved significantly. Between 2016 and 2018, the organization has retained nearly 100% of transition to practice program graduates. Employee surveys indicate a 90% approval rating for the residency program. In addition, the organization has realized a zero intent to turnover rate from residents and significant improvements in leader empowering behavior and nursing incivility scores.

Graduates of the Versant competency-based residency program now hold leadership roles within Baxter, often becoming preceptors themselves, and 50% of DAISY award recipients are graduates of the program.



### Improved Nurse Turnover

Zero intent to turnover reported in the last 2 years of the new graduate residency program.



### Increased Leader Empowerment

On a 5 point scale, all new graduate residents rate their leader empowering behavior as 4.52.



### Better Nurse Physician Relationships

Incivility from physicians dropped 28% with lack of respect and abusive supervision both declining.



### Improved Professional Development

27% of new graduate resident alumni have been developed into additional professional roles.

"With Versant in place, we have made significant progress at Baxter Regional Medical Center to engage and empower our nurses so that they can effectively motivate and mobilize themselves and others to accomplish positive outcomes, not just for patients but also for themselves. As a result, we are seeing historically low turnover rates, more high-quality applicants and a high number of staff serving as positive change agents, role models and leaders," said Nachtigal.

With support from Versant, Baxter's competency-based transition to practice program has produced an overall more confident and competent workforce, which has resulted in improved recruitment of both new and experienced nurses.

"Baxter has become more prolific in its ability to recruit experienced nurses to the team, and we believe that the transition to practice program has made a significant impact. Because the program trains new graduate nurses on how to be successful in the organization, it removes the burden from experienced nurses, allowing them to focus on doing their jobs effectively and efficiently, which has created a better, more empowering experience for everyone," said Nachtigal.