

ARKANSAS CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL WORKFORCE | CASE STUDY

Location: Pediatric hospital located in Little Rock, Arkansas **Services:** 336 beds, three intensive care units, Level I Trauma Center
Community Served: Arkansas' children, from birth to 21

CHALLENGES

The best outcomes start with a highly qualified and competent nursing staff. Nurses spend more time with patients and their families than anyone else at the hospital, placing them at ground zero for quality and safety. For a pediatric hospital like Arkansas Children's Hospital, every care decision affects entire families. Proper and consistent nursing procedure and training can be the key to creating the best outcomes for everyone.

Consistently developing highly competent nurses and nurse leaders was a major challenge for Arkansas Children's Hospital. Suffering from low engagement and lack of empowerment, nurses were leaving for other opportunities at significant rates. As one of the largest pediatric hospitals in the United States with a Level I Trauma Center, Arkansas Children's Hospital was lacking a structured process. They were challenged with developing competencies unique to pediatric care for both new graduate and experienced nurses.

"Our nurses were highly motivated to do a good job. They just didn't know how because we, as an organization, did not have a consistent definition for what that was," said Lee Anne Eddy, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, Arkansas Children's Hospital Senior Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer. "Every patient admitted to our hospital is sick. Especially for new graduates working

CHALLENGES

- Lack of robust systemic process to increase competency
- Need to eliminate high turnover rate
- Need to reduce dependence on travel nurses
- No evidence-based system for tracking outcomes
- Desire to achieve Magnet recognition

SOLUTIONS

- Established new graduate residency program
- Implement experienced nurse transition to specialty fellowship program
- Used residency and fellowship to attract quality talent
- Focused on creating a higher level of professionalism
- Made Magnet an organizational goal

RESULTS

- Improved nursing staff retention and satisfaction
- Increased nurse quality
- Developed a pipeline of nurse leaders
- Improved care consistency
- Achieved Magnet designation

CHALLENGES

in a pediatric environment where every patient needs advanced clinical care, nursing can be scary. We were not giving our nurses the necessary training and development to manage their patients effectively which contributed to unusually high turnover rates.”

To fill gaps the organization did what many hospitals do: leveraged costly temporary nursing staff. While solving the immediate need of filling shifts, this did nothing to solve the challenge of improving quality and creating highly competent trained nurses and nurse leaders.

A highly satisfied, competent workforce is a signature of hospitals with Magnet® designation. Earning Magnet designation was high on Arkansas Children’s Hospital’s list of goals; however with challenging retention numbers and no evidence-based system for tracking success, that goal was daunting to reach.

“Earning Magnet designation was very important to the organization, because we knew that we had great outcomes and were doing great work, but were lacking the necessary evidence,” said Lee Anne. “We needed to have the evidence to prove ourselves and get the external validation, not just for Arkansas Children’s Hospital but for the community we serve.”



SOLUTIONS

Increased demand for quality care means there is no shortage of workforce management strategies and dozens of corresponding technology solutions in the marketplace. Arkansas Children's Hospital's nursing leadership team determined that Versant's nurse competency training programs would be the solution to develop its pediatric nursing staff into highly competent, trained nurses and nurse leaders. This would in turn enable the organization to improve retention, recruit higher quality new graduate RNs, and ultimately achieve Magnet designation.

Learning at the point of care

Arkansas Children's Hospital uses Versant New Graduate Nurse Residency™ to ensure transition to practice competency for new graduate nurses. At organizations without a structured residency program, new nurses may look online for answers or ask other more experienced nurses for their opinion. What transpires is not necessarily the best answer, but several different answers or approaches to the same question. At Arkansas Children's Hospital, preceptors share their experience and knowledge with the resident, enhancing their development.

According to Lee Anne, "before we implemented the residency program, our nurses had some classroom training, but not the time to process, think, anticipate and learn. The best thing about the Versant® residency program is that it goes beyond the classroom. It allows our nurses to learn directly from preceptors and process what they see day to day at the point of care. This allows them to reflect and make better decisions, so they can better anticipate what they might do next time."

Dedicated to developing all nurses

To support Arkansas Children's Hospital's specific challenges as a pediatric hospital, implementation of the residency program was not limited to new graduates transitioning into practice. Instead the organization chose to expand the program to include experienced nurses transitioning into new clinical specialties through the Versant Transition Nurse Fellowship™.

Competing for the best talent

The way Arkansas Children's Hospital has structured their transition to practice programs is also having a positive impact on the organization's ability to recruit talent. Hired in cohorts, these nurses form a peer group that goes through the training and learning process together. Through this support system there is a sense of belonging and camaraderie that lasts long past the completion of the programs. The benefits of a nurse receiving the Versant residency or fellowship at Arkansas Children's Hospital have been recognized by nursing students and are well-known, resulting in an increased number of applicants and a significant jump in nurses holding a BSN.

"Before implementing our residency programs, we were struggling to identify and recruit the best, most diverse applicants, both in and outside of Little Rock," said Lee Anne. "Because Arkansas Children's Hospital has invested in training, developing and supporting our nurses we have been able improve the quality and diversity of our applicants."



Created a cultural transformation

With help from the Versant residency and transition fellowship programs, Arkansas Children's Hospital has also realized a significant shift in culture.

According to Lee Anne, "the Versant residency and fellowship programs have changed the culture of nursing at Arkansas Children's infinitely for the better. The care our nurses provide is better, and their confidence is so much higher. The program has allowed us to create a level of professionalism that has led to even more compassion for patients and families, which is good for everyone."

Supporting the Magnet Journey

In selecting Versant, Arkansas Children's Hospital implemented a competency-based transition to practice program that relies on evidence and focuses on outcomes — two critical components for achieving Magnet designation.

"Evidence-based outcomes really help us measure the impact of the pre-residency and the post-residency. Versant provides objective data that show us the difference in the outcomes and the care that our nurses provide, giving us the proof-points that we needed to achieve Magnet recognition," said Lee Anne.

Safety is a core value and top priority for Arkansas Children's Hospital and is also a requirement for Magnet. "Many of our safety goals and actions tie directly to the Versant competencies. Everything works together to achieve better patient outcomes," added Lee Anne.

RESULTS

Put the brakes on turnover

Since launching the competency-based residency program, turnover rates at Arkansas Children's Hospital have been at an all-time low.

"By investing in the programs that ensure every nurse at Arkansas Children's Hospital feels they have the right skills and competencies to manage their patients with confidence, we have created a more satisfied workforce. When nurses have the best training they stay longer, which reduces turnover. Employees who leave now are doing so for reasons unrelated to the workplace culture or environment. This is not only great for the organization, but for all of our patients and their families," said Lee Anne.

Increased nurse quality

The investment in nurse training and empowerment has also yielded the organization higher quality applicants from everywhere, not just Little Rock. Today, many new graduate applicants come from states outside of Arkansas.

"The residency training program has allowed us to reach potential employees far beyond the borders of Little Rock and the state of Arkansas," said Lee Anne. "Our investment in professional nurse development has enabled us to broaden the pool of candidates interested in working for our organization. We always have our pick of the most talented, highest quality applicants," said Lee Anne.

Developed the next generation of leaders

Arkansas Children's Hospital's focus on training and development is helping the organization create the next generation of nursing leaders. Since the program began, 64% of alumni of the new graduate residency program have gone on to hold leadership positions within the organization as preceptors.

As a result of the investment in nurse training and development, more of Arkansas Children's Hospital's nurses are feeling empowered. This has not only contributed to high retention numbers, but an increase in the number of nurses holding a BSN.

"Before we started the program less than 50% of our nurses held a BSN. Since the program launched that number has jumped to more than 70%," said Lee Anne.

RESULTS

Improved care consistency

With stable retention numbers and a pipeline of high-quality candidates eager to be part of the Arkansas Children's Hospital team, dependence on temporary nursing staff to fill scheduling gaps has decreased significantly.

"All of our nurses are trained in competencies specific to the patients that come through the doors at Arkansas Children's Hospital," said Lee Anne. "Because of the residency program our nurses have the right competencies and are delivering the care consistency required by Arkansas' most vulnerable patients."

"Our residency and fellowship programs have taken nursing to the next level of professionalism and outcomes. I think when you tell someone that you are a nurse, there is broad appreciation. In the state of Arkansas, when you tell someone that you work for Arkansas Children's Hospital people find that extra special. The pride that comes from doing what we do here stems from the knowledge that we are surrounded by highly talented and competent nursing professionals."

Lee Anne Eddy, MSN, RN, NEA-BC
Senior Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer
Arkansas Children's Hospital

Earning Magnet designation

Only the top six percent of hospitals in the world can achieve Magnet designation. With help from the Versant residency and fellowship programs, Arkansas Children's Hospital was able to demonstrate that it belongs on that list.

"Magnet is not a singular stamp of approval. It is something that very few hospitals earn but also are required to sustain it. In fact, one of the things that makes Magnet so valuable is that hospitals must keep improving and showing that they are taking it to the next level. Our residency and fellowship programs help keep the organization engaged in that process. It gives us the metrics to show that we are not simply satisfied with the status quo, but rather we're taking it to the next level and always looking for ways to be better," said Lee Anne.

Arkansas Children's Hospital's investment in nursing residency and fellowship programs has changed the culture at the organization for the better. No longer just a place to work, Arkansas Children's Hospital is a place where people are proud to be part of a team that provides the best possible care to their patients.