Ready, Set, Go... or Are We?
Magnet® Readiness Assessment Considerations
Gen Guanci, MEd, RN-BC, CCRN, Consultant

As you go through your personal education related to the Magnet Recognition Program® and the required Sources of Evidence and associated structures and processes, you are probably completing a mental checklist. This is the beginning of your organizational readiness assessment or gap analysis.

*Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (2006) defines a gap as “an incomplete or deficient area; a problem caused by some disparity.”

A gap analysis of your organization looks at where you want to go and what is required to get there. It is an examination of your desired state versus your current state, which results in a clear picture of what you’ll need to do in order to bring your vision of excellence to life. However, not all of the gaps you identify will be of the same sort. You may discover some “pure gaps” where processes, structures, and/or outcomes are just plain missing. But you will also have some gaps that fit better under the heading of “opportunities for improvement” or OFIs. The discovery of an OFI sounds more like “we have some ____,” “we need to improve on ____” or “we have ____ in some areas but not all.” Regardless of whether you have pure gaps or OFIs, they all need to be addressed if your designation or redesignation is to be successful.

Because of the importance of a thorough, accurate, and unbiased assessment, organizations should strongly consider using an outside resource or consultant to ensure an objective assessment. Someone who has gone through a journey—even as a Magnet® Program Director—may not be enough. The outside resource must be someone who has experience conducting comprehensive organizational assessments in a very short period of time; usually 2-3 days. He or she must also have a complete and thorough knowledge of the specific components, sources of evidence, as well as the structures, processes, and outcomes of a successful Magnet® journey. In addition, the person doing the assessment must have experience in a variety of organizations so he or she can bring a range of
suggestions and recommendations on how to be successful. Lastly, he or she must have the ability to generate a comprehensive written report of his or her findings.

Many organizations continue to work with the resource who conducts their organizational assessment throughout their entire designation journey. If you think this is the direction your organization will go, be sure to spend time interviewing several prospective resources. An important issue to consider is the availability of the consultant. Many who work as consultants do so in addition to their full time jobs. If this is the case with your consultant, you may find that your organization will be competing with priorities at the consultant’s other job. You will need to be sure your resource is someone who sees your success as their success and someone you can work with for the many months, and possibly years, of your journey.

The completed gap analysis will identify not only structures, processes, and outcomes that need to be created and implemented or merely strengthened, but also the cultural changes that must occur in order to move your organization toward its goal. Your organization would be wise to keep in mind that it will take much more time to change a culture than to implement structures and processes or to generate outcomes. Most agree that it takes anywhere from one to nine years to change a culture—never mind the time and commitment it takes to sustain this culture change.

One mistake many organizations make when completing a gap analysis is that they do a wonderful job completing it at the organizational level. However, the drill-down to the department, and more specifically the unit level, never occurs. An example of this can be seen in an organization that has a well-established nursing division practice council that operates under the principles of shared governance. Yet this same organization is lacking unit level councils or has unit level councils on only a few of its nursing units. Whether you call this a pure gap or an OFI doesn’t matter; it is a deficit that must be addressed.

The journey to Magnet® designation requires a tremendous commitment to both organizational and individual excellence. A big part of the reason that I love the work I do, is that it brings me into contact with intelligent, committed people who are willing to put their blood, sweat, and tears into improving the systems and processes that allow teams to provide the best possible level of care for patients and their families. It’s pretty simple: when an organization achieves Magnet®, the patient experience improves. That’s why I do what I do, and that’s why some of the best national and international health care organizations take on the extremely rewarding challenge of pursuing Magnet® designation and redesignation.

MAGNET®, Magnet Recognition Program®, ANCC®, Magnet®, and the Magnet Journey® are registered trademarks of the American Nurses Credentialing Center. The products and services of Creative Health Care Management are neither sponsored nor endorsed by ANCC. All Rights Reserved.