

Patti Aube, RN-BC, MSN, was recruited to St. Joseph Hospital in 1998 as the Director of Education and today serves as Executive Director of Nursing Professional Development and Research and Magnet Program Director. She has been nominated for several Values in Action awards through the years, and was a VIA finalist in 2004 and 2005. A 2011 nomination from Critical Care Outcomes Coordinator/Magnet Project Coordinator Souidi Bogert, RN, BSN, CCRN, explains why many people equate Patti with Excellence:

“Patti strives for excellence and demonstrates it every day in her work ethic, practice and vision. In every project, endeavor or arena, Patti is constantly thinking of how we can do it better. She looks for best practice patterns for the staff, patients and families. She is intelligent, open-minded, positive, realistic and honest in everything she is involved with. She is truly an example of striving for better and obtaining it,” writes Souidi.

Creates an environment of continuous improvement and learning.

Burlew Library Manager Danielle Linden, shares, “Since I’m new in management (her director) Patti was really good about finding classes I can take, and follows up with me to make sure that I’m able to attend. I’ve taken courses in facilitative leadership and managing from the middle, along with required ones such as budgeting process. Even before I started Patti had me scheduled for classes, knowing how important it is to learn, be equipped and involved in the culture.”

Clinical Educator Mary Welly, RN-BC, BSN, an SJO employee of more than 30 years, observes, “Patti facilitates the Education Council, and we conduct an annual needs assessment. She determines patient care and staff education needs and follows up on the needs expressed. Patti is very open to suggestions and encourages our creativity. She is a woman of action.”

Patti shares how she facilitates continuous improvement and learning at SJO. “I listen to ideas. Encourage problem solving, give feedback and when requested provide direction. I’m open to creative ways to deliver education and support thinking ‘out of the box.’ We’ve been developing

less traditional didactic courses and providing more courses online to be available at times convenient for staff.

Clinical Educator Kathy Dureault, RN, MSN, CCRN, CPAN, elaborates, “I can walk into Patti’s office with an idea; she’ll ask me to sit down and then she just listens. When I had the idea for the ‘pick it and stick it’ games as a strategy for educating nurses about our Professional Practice Model, she immediately encouraged me to go with it and supported the development of one poster for each unit in the hospital. It was the fuel I needed to proceed and make it a reality.”

Chief Nursing Officer Katie Skelton states, “Patti oversees more than 850 students of nursing who consistently rank St. Joseph Hospital as the best organization for learning amongst the hospitals where they train. She also has a great working relationship with the academic community. Several years ago she secured grants and collaborated with Santa Ana College to implement an onsite, extended campus program for nursing courses. This occurred during a severe nursing shortage, when Santa Ana’s program was impacted and couldn’t grow. By addressing the needs of the adult learner who works full time Monday through Friday, we’ve now had about 80 employees graduate from this program. Students have classes in the evening and clinical rotations on the weekends. This was the first time that I’m aware of that this was done anywhere in the nation, and it’s since been replicated across the country.”

Responds to changing health care and organizational needs by learning new skills and behaviors and by improving performance, processes and service.

In 2008, Patti’s “other duties as required” responsibilities swelled to include Magnet Program Director. Around the same time, the ANCC (Magnet accreditation body) changed their model from the 14 forces of magnetism into five components. As a result, SJO needed to re-strategize how the evidence would appear in the re-designation documentation. Patti viewed this as a learning process and collaborative effort. For example, she was instrumental in helping the division of Nursing to focus on Nurse Sensitive Indicators (NSIs) to create an awareness of unit-specific performance and how nurses can impact those results.

Because of the stringent Magnet designation and re-designation process, only 386 U.S. hospitals have a Magnet designation for nursing excellence. Soudi writes, “Patti has given much time and

energy to not only learn the role and responsibilities of this position, but also to perform at a level well above expected. The Magnet designation is extremely important to us and the journey is not an easy one. Patti realizes this as well as the enormous benefits it brings to the organization, the nurses and all staff involved. She has embraced this role and given it 110% to help us achieve re-designation. In the process, Patti has identified various gaps and barriers. From these findings, processes and practice changes have been made in order to not only address the issues but improve our overall outcomes and future re-designation journeys.”

Citing Patti’s highly effective oversight of the Magnet re-designation journey, as well as her successful spearheading of the Policy and Procedure process change, roll-out of the hospital’s clinical ladder system and development of a Nursing Research department, Katie comments, “Patti is a very seasoned, change-agent leader. She has high expectations for people and pushes them to excel. She is a mentor developer with superb management skills and an expert at leading major projects. She takes prides in her work, passes a sense of commitment and responsibility on to her team. When Patti takes on a project, I know it will be done thoroughly.”

To keep up with industry changes, Pattie has advocated for reimbursement of staff for continuing education. “When I started here, tuition reimbursement for nurses was \$400 per year,” recalls Patti. “Today it is \$5,000 and the program includes nurses going back for their DNP or PhD.”

Danielle provided this example of improvement: “Every two years the Library does a survey. This year there was feedback requesting additional quiet space areas and computers for literature searches, and Patti wanted to respond to that. There was a room in the Library that was not well utilized, and we determined it would be a great space for this need. The budget was tight, but Patti helped find repurposed computers and leftover carpet squares. With her direction we were able to spend a minimum amount and turn the space into something useful.”

Encourages new ideas and discovers and shares best practices.

Katie describes Patti as “an earnest listener and sounding board.” As Danielle attests, “Even though Patti has been extremely busy with the Magnet re-designation, she has never said she can’t meet or cut our time short. She always takes the time to share what is going on in the organization and pass on updates from the Executive Management Team.”

Critical Care Educator Vivian Norman, RN, MSN, CCRN, adds, “Patti taps into the creative person, pairs them with someone who is process-oriented and watches as things happen. Then she gives the credit where credit is due. She never takes credit for what her team accomplishes.”

As a Magnet facility, St. Joseph Hospital is expected to be a mentor to other hospitals pursuing designation. Patti has personally been in contact with staff from St. Joseph Health System ministries and other hospitals – most recently sharing SJO best practices with UC Davis Medical Center. Looking ahead, Patti has been developing plans for after SJO’s Magnet re-designation visit in June. She shares, “I’ve been asking, ‘How can we do it differently?’ One idea is to have a standing agenda item at Nursing Leadership Team meetings on Magnet, asking, ‘What is our evidence for meeting this standard?’ As we get closer to the survey we’ll have many examples, and we’ll have kept the standards alive.”

Establishes clear goals and plans.

Patti’s management style involves discussing with her individual staff members their measurable goals and timelines. “We meet a couple of times each year to talk about where they are, and to renegotiate goals and or timelines if barriers arise,” says Patti.

Katie notes, “Patti recently had an unplanned major medical procedure. With the Magnet journey underway, Patti put in place a masterful schedule and chose to have the procedure when we had the best window for her to be out and work from home. She gave me a huge heads up and proceeded to do everything needed to put the nursing executives and organization on a timeline. It was the most exceptional leave of absence I have ever seen in my life. In spite of her serious medical condition, we essentially lost no ground because of her expert, proactive handling.”

Takes responsibility for individual and team actions and expects accountability for performance. Encourages team ownership of projects and service outcomes.

When Danielle came to St. Joseph Hospital, Patti had her business cards ready for her. “That’s never happened to me before; it’s usually three months later. For me it was a real vote of confidence,” says Danielle. “The attention she gives to each of her direct reports fosters a commitment. When I’m working on something she’s assigned, I know she’ll follow up with me.”

Soudi writes, “Patti has ultimate responsibility for ensuring the Magnet documents are complete, thorough and address all ‘sources of evidence’ (SOE) required by the ANCC. As a leader of the Magnet Steering Committee, Patti assigned each member with one of the Magnet components. She provided them with clear instructions on what is required and expected. Each component group led their teams and reported back to the Steering Committee and Patti regularly. With updates and evaluations, each component leader was guided and supported by Patti all the way. It was a huge undertaking. Ultimately, all final documents and SOE were reviewed, edited and finalized by Patti and sent for submission. In the end, our documents were pristine and an excellent portrayal of how Magnet is alive and well at St. Joseph Hospital every day.”

Demonstrates collaboration and encourages it in others.

Patti collaborates with hospital personnel in all areas. Danielle states, “We sit on a lot of committees together. On clinical topics Patti often brings up my name, mentioning what I can do in terms of the library and evidence-based information.”

According to Kathy Dureault, who has worked under Patti for 10 years, “Patti seems to have an innate ability to discern our individual strengths and encourages us, stretches us, and transforms us to be the best that we can be. She is empowering. When she assigned me to facilitate the annual Nursing Evidence Based Practice Seminar, she must have known how much I would grow to love planning this yearly educational event that provides nurses with the latest research about various topics, ultimately leading to Perfect Care for our patients. Patti is a servant leader who always ends each one-on-one meeting with the words, “Is there anything I can do for you?” We know we can count on her to be our advocate and, more importantly, to grow us into the best we can be in order to ‘pay it forward’ and to serve others.”

Summary

Excellent skills notwithstanding, Patti excels because, as she says, “I want to know every day that I get up and come to work that I’ll make a difference to someone, to some outcome. That’s a great day. It’s the small things in a process that add up to affect patient outcomes.”