

Practice Transition Accreditation Program

 American Nurses Credentialing Center

Sanford Health: Scaling Nurse Transition to Practice Excellence Through ANCC PTAP

BACKGROUND

Sanford Health is one of the largest not for profit rural health systems in the United States, headquartered in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, with hospitals, clinics, and care settings spanning multiple states and regions. The organization supports a large nursing workforce across urban, regional, and rural practice environments.

As Sanford Health continued to expand its nursing workforce across geographically dispersed sites, executive leadership identified the need for a standardized, high quality nurse residency program that could ensure consistent preparation of newly licensed nurses while aligning with organizational quality and workforce priorities.

To support this goal, Sanford Health selected the ANCC Practice Transition Accreditation Program® (PTAP) as the framework to guide the design, implementation, and evaluation of its enterprise nurse residency program.

CHALLENGES

- Sanford Health faced several organizational challenges common to large, multi-site health systems:
- Variation in nurse residency program structure and delivery across regions
- The need to standardize transition to practice education while supporting diverse practice settings
- An accelerated timeline to align nurse residency accreditation with broader organizational and nursing accreditation efforts
- Disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring rapid changes to program delivery
- Limited enterprise level visibility into nurse residency outcomes, retention, and professional development progression

Senior leadership required a scalable, evidence-based solution that could support workforce stability, program consistency, and accreditation readiness across the system.

SOLUTIONS AND STRATEGIES

Sanford Health intentionally used PTAP standards as a foundational design tool, embedding accreditation requirements directly into program development rather than treating accreditation as a separate or downstream activity.

Key strategies included:

- Establishing enterprise level governance, co-led by a Nurse Residency Program Director and system Chief Nursing Officer supported by regional/site clinical coordinators and nursing leadership
- Developing a standardized nurse residency curriculum and professional practice framework applicable across multiple regions and practice settings
- Engaging cross functional teams spanning nursing education, operations, leadership, and quality
- Rapidly pivoting to virtual and hybrid program delivery models during the COVID-19 pandemic while maintaining program integrity
- Implementing a structured evaluation and reporting approach, including dashboards to support accreditation reporting and leadership oversight
- Systematically collecting resident stories and outcome evidence aligned with PTAP domains to support accreditation and continuous improvement

This approach enabled Sanford Health to launch, scale, and sustain a unified nurse residency program across a complex organizational footprint.

RESULTS

Through structured alignment with PTAP, Sanford Health achieved the following results:

- Initial PTAP accreditation with distinction, following a successful virtual accreditation visit in March 2021, with accreditation notification received in April 2021
- PTAP reaccreditation with distinction, following a subsequent virtual accreditation review, with the accreditation call held on May 19
- Inclusion of 889 nurse residents across four cohorts in the initial PTAP accreditation submission
- Inclusion of 2,260 nurse residents in the reaccreditation review window
- Expansion of the accredited nurse residency program across additional sites, regions, and practice settings, including new geographic markets

Accreditation became both a validation of program quality and a mechanism for ongoing program refinement.

OUTCOMES

Sanford Health reported measurable organizational outcomes supported by enterprise data tracking and program evaluation:

- Sustained nurse retention at a 90% benchmark, with retention rates meeting the organization's established target
- Accelerated professional development progression, with 30% of nurse residents completing preceptor training within 12 months, exceeding the original multi-year target and resulting in formal revision of the professional development goal timeframe
- 19 nurse residency cohorts graduated to date
- 3,398 nurse residents having participated in the program since inception
- Implementation of an enterprise Power BI dashboard supporting tracking of retention, transfers, promotions, seminar attendance, and professional development outcomes

These outcomes provided leadership with improved visibility into workforce trends and supported data informed decision making at the enterprise level.

CONCLUSIONS

Sanford Health's experience demonstrates how ANCC PTAP® functions as a strategic framework for building, scaling, and sustaining nurse transition to practice programs across large, geographically dispersed health systems.

By embedding PTAP standards into governance, curriculum design, evaluation, and leadership oversight, Sanford Health achieved accreditation success while strengthening workforce stability, professional development pathways, and organizational accountability.

LESSONS LEARNED

Sanford Health identified several for healthcare organizations considering PTAP:

- Designing programs using PTAP standards from the outset streamlines accreditation readiness
- Enterprise governance and role clarity are essential when scaling across multiple sites
- Early investment in data infrastructure strengthens leadership confidence and reporting capability
- Flexibility in delivery models allows accredited programs to remain resilient during operational disruption
- Accreditation supports continuous improvement, not just compliance

These lessons are particularly applicable for health systems navigating workforce shortages, regional variation, and increasing expectations for quality and accountability.

ANCC Practice Transition Accreditation Program® (PTAP). recognizes programs that offer high-quality nurse residency and fellowship programs that transition nurses into practice with confidence and competence.

Contact us at practicetransition@ana.org.

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