

### **Illustrating the Value of the ASHP Certificate of Excellence in Medication-Use Safety and Pharmacy Practice Program**

For many years, ASHP's pharmacy residency accreditation was considered the pinnacle of health system pharmacy accreditation processes. Residency accreditation evaluates processes related to the quality of the organization's pharmacy services and the residents' practice experience. It was unique to institutions through the early 1990's when there were many fewer pharmacy residency programs. In the 1990's and early 2000's the concept of pharmaceutical care, evolution of clinical pharmacy services, and establishment of the Pharm.D. degree as the entry level credential for the profession led to an acceleration in the demand for, and remarkable growth in the number of healthcare organizations hosting residency programs. Additionally, aided by advances in automation/technology and changes in healthcare payment, many health systems began the process of integrating across the continuum of care by expanding pharmacy's reach beyond traditional inpatient services to ambulatory clinics, retail pharmacies and specialty pharmacy. While ASHP did offer mechanisms to accredit different segments of practice, it became apparent the profession needed to develop a more robust, "next level" accreditation process for those organizations wishing to distinguish themselves in the areas of medication use outcomes, patient safety, and progressive pharmacy practice. This desire for a more comprehensive quality, and outcomes-based evaluation for hospitals and health system pharmacy was the driver for the development of the ASHP Center of Excellence in Medication Use Safety and Pharmacy Practice certification standard e.g. ASHP Certified Center of Excellence™.

The importance of the development of an outcomes-based comprehensive assessment of pharmacy services cannot be understated. As the complexity and cost of healthcare increases exponentially, hospital and health system administrators and pharmacy leaders need new ways to assess and articulate how pharmacy services impact patient outcomes and deliver value. The Center of Excellence survey assesses elements from 12 different domains of practice. Much like the American Nurses Credentialing Center's (ANCC) Magnet Recognition Program<sup>1</sup> process (hereafter referred to as Magnet), which employs a similar standards-based continuous quality improvement approach, Center of Excellence certification assures leaders that their pharmacy services are in alignment with comprehensive, contemporary pharmacy practices. Unlike many healthcare consulting organizations that assess only financial performance, the Center of Excellence approach blends clinical and financial outcomes to provide leaders with a complete picture of performance. In addition, Center of Excellence certification is expected to afford organizations with the opportunity to differentiate themselves to the public, and prospective employees, from other competitors in their marketplace much like Magnet, Joint Commission specialty certification or U.S. News and World Report designation.

Center of Excellence certification may afford health system pharmacy leaders several ways to assess and improve the performance of their operations. Unlike pharmacy residency accreditation, which evaluates process, the Center of Excellence certification is focused on how the organization and the pharmacy department use data to improve performance over time. The comprehensive nature of the standard requires leaders to assemble clinical, operational, and quality data across the continuum of care which often involves constituents outside of pharmacy. With the Standard in mind, the preparation process may help leaders reassess, reorganize, and consolidate the way they manage data in their departments, improving efficiency. In some cases, this may assist leaders in identifying gaps in the assessment of services that can be addressed with future initiatives. Identification of these gaps either before or during the survey may help pharmacy leaders in their pursuit of solutions to those gaps with hospital leadership. Data describing pharmacy driven

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nursingworld.org/organizational-programs/magnet/> Accessed May 21, 2024

patient care outcomes may also lead to new ways for leaders to communicate to staff, over time, on departmental performance, thereby improving employee engagement. Finally, this preparation may boost the organization's state of readiness for future survey processes from the Joint Commission, state, or other accrediting/ regulatory bodies.

Numerous other benefits may occur because of the Center of Excellence certification. A limited number of organizations have achieved this designation. As a result, pharmacy employees and other staff working throughout the hospital know they are working with an elite health system pharmacy program. With time and greater recognition, the Center of Excellence designation can become an important tool in the recruiting of new staff, residents, and students. Knowing that an organization is practicing at the top of the profession can be a potent recruiting incentive for talented young pharmacists. Finally, because many progressive organizations hold multiple accreditations and certifications, ASHP is beginning to explore ways to consolidate accreditation processes to make it more efficient and cost-effective for both healthcare organizations and ASHP.

It is too early to make a definitive assessment of the long-term value of the Center of Excellence certification for the pharmacy department or organization or for the pharmacy profession. The potential is huge if it leads to measurable improvements of pharmacy service and links to certification in other programs such as TJC, Magnet program, or medical specialty program accreditation. COE may also advance recognition of pharmacy department's programs and services value within the health system and beyond.

Preparing for the COE survey is an opportunity for pharmacy leaders to engage their staff and other key partners (physicians/providers, administrators, nurses, medication safety, quality, finance, etc.) in the components of a complete pharmacy program. COE preparation may help organizations identify important practice gaps or opportunities that give them leverage to prioritize resources required to close those gaps. This can positively improve staff and constituent engagement in the pharmacy's work.

COE preparation can help organizations assess what data they routinely collect, how they use it to improve services and where they may have a need to develop new metrics/measures. Pulling all this data together into digestible tools that communicate these efforts for the COE survey team may help the organization streamline the way this data is presented.

The COE surveyor review and report is an opportunity for your hospital administrator to evaluate the quality of pharmacy services through a rigorous self-study and assessment, against a professionally developed best-practice standard without calling high-priced consultants. It provides a roadmap to conduct a routine 'inventory' of achievements and goals. It provides education and direction in pursuit of excellence. It is clear that the COE initial preparation, with ongoing improvements, will complement your department's continuous accreditation agency (e.g., DNV or TJC) readiness efforts.

Attainment of COE status can be a source of pride for the pharmacy department and organization. It can enhance pharmacist and technician staff recruitment and retention bragging rights. For pharmacy departments with residency and teaching programs, COE certification provides a key opportunity to market their programs to learners as competition increases to keep rotation sites full. It is possible that this deep-dive COE certification will be accepted in the future as a component of the pharmacy services review for residency accreditation surveys in health systems that conduct pharmacy residency training.

The decision to pursue the Center of Excellence designation can be intimidating because once made it will require significant work and a high level of commitment on the part of the pharmacy department leadership team and organization. Given the daily demands most pharmacy leaders face, why would anyone choose to take on this additional challenge? We believe there are several compelling reasons to do so. First, unlike Joint Commission and/or state board of pharmacy/health department survey processes which are minimum standard, the Center of Excellence survey process is an optimal standard designed to recognize excellence specifically in health system pharmacy practice. Like the Magnet program, Center of Excellence designation confers excellence like no other external survey process because of its basis in evidence and specificity to health system pharmacy practice. The only other survey process for health system pharmacy practice that approaches this level of specificity and rigor is ASHP's residency accreditation process. Those hospital

pharmacies with accredited residency programs are well positioned to begin the preparation for the Center of Excellence. It is important to note, however, that only a fraction of these pharmacies will be immediately capable of achieving the Center of Excellence designation due to the extensive nature of the standard and require preparation particularly around patient safety and quality data. This certification provides organizations with an objective way to differentiate themselves from competitors.

A second reason to pursue Center of Excellence designation relates to the desire many leaders have to continuously improve themselves and their practices. There are few ways for pharmacy leaders to objectively prove the work of their department is superior to what is done in other comparable organizations. Many pharmacy leaders are competitive and by nature wired to pursue excellence in all life domains. Individuals with these attributes can use the Center of Excellence preparation process as a mechanism to identify ways to improve themselves, their organizations and champion change. The Center of Excellence program's standard provides leaders with a template for what is required to achieve excellence in all practice domains. Leaders can use these templates to drive change through strategic planning and other CQI processes. Compliance with Center of Excellence standards requires individuals and organizations to embrace a culture of excellence in practice. Center of Excellence certification can help leaders codify that culture.

Another positive element of pursuing the Center of Excellence certification can be its positive impact on employee engagement. Successful pursuit of certification requires high levels of staff commitment in helping construct the initial application and the on-site survey. Survey teams use a tracer methodology which is designed to allow them to interact with staff members throughout the organization. In every survey conducted to date, staff have reveled in the opportunity to tell the survey team what they do to ensure patients receive superior care. Staff members clearly take pride in describing how their work contributes to excellence. Participation in the survey process also helps staff better understand opportunities that may exist for improvement, helping leaders better achieve buy in for needed changes. Finally, when hard-earned certification is achieved staff understand and appreciate it to be recognition of team excellence for work well done and celebrate appropriately. The sense of pride from this unique designation can later be shared with prospective employees, learners, and other key constituents.

Finally, health system administrators who aspire to excellence are always looking for ways to objectively differentiate the services they provide from their competitors. Like Magnet designation, Center of Excellence certification provides health system leaders reassurance that pharmacy services in their organization have been objectively reviewed by a respected third party with a high level of expertise using the most rigorous standard ever developed to evaluate health system pharmacy practice. Given the incredibly significant role pharmacy now plays in achieving optimal medication therapy outcomes, cost containment, patient safety and the application of technology to patient care, administrators are looking for assurance that services are being optimally delivered. Center of Excellence designation can serve administrators and the public as a true differentiator in the increasingly competitive world of health care service delivery.

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