PROBLEM
The lack of a structured orientation program for new graduate nurses contributed to a poor transition from school to the profession with nurses reporting little confidence, poorly-developed skills and little professional autonomy. This influenced the high turnover rates at 1 year. Best practice supported that nursing residency programs facilitate the transition to practice, build confidence, improve skills and improve retention.

EVIDENCE
The evidence suggested that newly graduated nurses lack confidence in caring for complex patients. It has been estimated that 42% of new RN hires will be new graduates. Literature suggests that it takes at least 1 year to master the skills and technology needed to provide competent, safe patient care.

STRATEGY
The evidence suggested that a residency program was essential for new graduates. A program emphasizing skill development and assimilation in the professional environment would contribute to a positive learning experience and improved retention.

PRACTICE CHANGE
The organization engaged in a structured 18-week evidence-based residency program. Program components include classroom activities, guided clinical experiences, formal mentoring, debriefing groups and a comprehensive evaluation process. Formal training for preceptors, mentors and subject matter experts is integral to the program.

EVALUATION
1. Results of Schutzenhofer Professional Nurse Autonomy Scale
2. Results of Slater Nursing Competencies Rating—self-report
3. Results of Slater Nursing Competencies Rating—observed
4. Results of Group Cohesion Scale
5. Turnover at 1-year

RESULTS
Survey results from the first 2 residency cohorts completed at the beginning and end of the program:
1. Average 2.5% increase in feelings of autonomy
2. Average 6.6% increase in perceived group cohesion
3. Average 7.7% improvement in self-report of nursing competencies
4. Average 13.9% improvement in direct observation of nursing competencies
5. Turnover decreased to 1.4%
RECOMMENDATIONS
A structured nursing residency program improves skill development and assimilation into the professional environment and significantly impacts retention rates.

LESSONS LEARNED
The success of the program is greatly dependent on the commitment of preceptors and mentors.

BIBLIOGRAPHY