Staff Retention and Stability in Long Term Care

An Overview of Staffing Challenges in the Long-Term Care Setting

As the population ages and we have an increased number of baby boomers soon needing access to long term care services, the demand for competent caregivers in these settings continues to be on the rise. The acuity of individuals requiring services in the post-acute and long term care industry has increased over the years and this has led to a greater level of dependence on the direct care workers in nursing homes. A report by American Health Care Association (AHCA) in 2012 found that the median turnover rate for all employees in America’s skilled nursing facilities was 43.9%. The median turnover rate for RNs was 50% and for LPN/LVN was the lowest at 36.4%.1

There are many costs associated with turnover including monetary and non-monetary such as poor clinical outcomes at times resulting in hospital readmission. Additionally, there are costs for employee replacement, loss of productivity, agency staff to fill in for vacancies which often are double the usual cost of employees. Staff and resident morale is negatively impacted, increasing work stress, job dissatisfaction, increased overtime costs, and family and resident dissatisfaction. According to an article in McKnight’s Long Term Care news: The Keys to Reducing Turnover in Long Term Care, on average, the per-worker cost of turnover in the United States economy is approximately 20% of the workers annual compensation.2
Why is retention and staff stability important?

Retention of staff in the long term care setting is important for many reasons. Retention and stability can benefit the residents because trusting relationships can form when residents know their caregivers. The residents do not have to explain to new caregivers how to care for them and resident needs can be anticipated.

Staff stability is beneficial to the direct care team as care can be provided more consistently and organized when the team members know and trust each other. The use of temporary staff can be avoided, preventing the staff from having to work with nurses or CNA’s who do not know the residents, their routines, and the routines of the facility. Employees have increased satisfaction when stability is achieved and they are less likely to leave the organization.

When staff are retained and the workforce is stable, the nursing homes reduce direct and indirect costs associated with the turnover. Money is not being spent on advertising, interviewing, training of new staff and the clinical outcomes and quality of care are not negatively impacted.  

Retaining a stable workforce is crucial to quality care, positive clinical outcomes and growth. In an article in Leading Age Magazine in July 2016, Debra Wood, RN stated “Aging services remains a people field. Caregivers and clients build relationships, leading to better outcomes. That being the case, retaining frontline and other staff becomes a critical task for organizations.”

What practices can be implemented to achieve success in retaining staff?

Direct care workers in long term care often remain with the profession because they consider their work worthwhile, providing care to the elderly gives them a sense of purpose and they feel they can make a difference. Employee retention improves when employees feel they are valued.

The reasons an employee decides to stay in with an organization and work in the long term care setting has to do with the organizations commitment to the employee and having a sense of connection with supervisors, peers, and the residents they care for.
Create environments that encourage retention through:

- Creation of a meaningful mission and incorporate into the culture
  - Employees are attracted to organizations with missions consistent with his or her morals and values.
- Creation of opportunities for employees to learn, grow, and advance personally and professionally
- Cultivation of an environment consistent with positive emotions and experiences for employees, residents and customers
- Provision of leadership training
  - Quint Studer, Author of Hardwiring Excellence discusses that employees don’t quit organizations, they quit leaders. Later in the chapter he states, “if the greatest percentage of employees leave their jobs because of their relationship with their supervisor, then the best thing that we can offer an employee and an organization is a great leader.” Leadership training is essential to develop great leaders.
- Front line staff engagement in committees and projects
  - This promotes buy-in and shared decision making
- Reward and recognition programs
- Competitive salary and benefits
- Offering a comprehensive orientation program and consider assigning a mentor to new employees
- Participation in staffing huddles, resident care planning, and care conferences
- Consideration of self-scheduling
- Peer interviewing
- Rounding for outcomes
  - Maintains open communication with opportunities to follow-up and reward and recognize employees
- Clear communication regarding job expectations and performance feedback more frequently than with evaluations
- Provision of education opportunities to assist is providing knowledge and tools to maintain competencies and introduce best practices
- Provide wellness incentives and education offerings on caregiver support and avoiding burnout
**Conclusion**

Staff retention and stability are crucial to the viability of long term care facilities. Creating an environment that encourages retention through implementation of the practices described above are just some of the ways to assist in reducing costs associated with turnover and staff satisfaction would increase. This would result in providing better quality care, positive clinical outcomes and ultimately a greater quality of life for residents.

**Resources**

Advancing Excellence offers a variety of resources for nursing homes looking to improve staff stability. You can access this resource at [https://www.nhqualitycampaign.org/goalDetail.aspx?g=ss](https://www.nhqualitycampaign.org/goalDetail.aspx?g=ss)

Another great resource is the American Healthcare Association staff stability webpage which can be accessed at [https://www.ahcancal.org/quality_improvement/qualityinitiative/Pages/Staff-Stability.aspx](https://www.ahcancal.org/quality_improvement/qualityinitiative/Pages/Staff-Stability.aspx)

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