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Resources for Nursing Home Professionals

Developing a Culturally Competent Workforce

With more than 100 cultural and ethnic groups in California and over 200 languages spoken, multicultural groups are now the majority in the state. A diverse, culturally competent workforce reduces staff turnover, improves patient care, and enhances resident satisfaction. This FastFacts focuses on helping nursing home leaders and staff members foster a culture of diversity and develop a culturally competent workforce.

Support Your Diverse Workforce

- **Promote ESL training programs.** Nursing students and foreign-born nurses for whom English is a second language provide 80 to 90 percent of direct care to residents. Establish partnerships with community colleges and vocational schools to help certified nurse's aides speak English as a Second Language (ESL) and prepare them for job success. These programs can improve English fluency, nursing care skills, and cultural awareness.
- **Support career advancement programs.** A successful career advancement program offers GED and ESL programs for employees who do not have a high school diploma or have limited communication skills. Encourage staff to take pre-college or college-level courses to advance their health care careers, such as certified nurse's aide training for service employees and on-site evening and weekend licensed practical nurse programs for work-study certified nurse's aides.

Sponsor On-the-Job Training

- **Promote customized on-site training.** Training at the workplace is very attractive to front-line staff. Foreign-educated nurses may not be fully familiar with specific practices in California health facilities. Successful programs focusing on communication, cultural competency, and basic nursing skills—including assessment, data collection, documentation, evaluation, medication, and measurement—increase job skills and satisfaction.
- **Develop a mentor system.** A mentor is an experienced staff member who works with an employee as a role model, social support, tutor, and peer resource. Mentoring programs improve staff retention, motivation, satisfaction, and productivity. They also provide continuity in the new hire process and enhance quality resident care.

Focus on Communication and Cultural Competency Skills

- **Offer cross-cultural communication training.** ESL nursing assistants may experience communication difficulties when performing their jobs. For example, when asked to “dress the wound” they may clothe the resident instead of applying a bandage. Have ESL nursing students participate in role-playing exercises focusing on improving communication, making small talk, improving pronunciation, and providing emotional support.
- **Offer cultural competency training.** Cultural competence is becoming a standard requirement in long term care. Develop monthly or quarterly staff diversity discussion groups. Focus on cultural awareness and communication. Check relevance in planning and service delivery. Work with staff on actionable steps to create a culture that embraces diversity.
- **Pay attention to non-verbal communication.** About 60 percent of communication is non-verbal. Cross-cultural communication is challenging because different cultures may misunderstand non-verbal cues—some of which could even be offensive to some cultures.
- **Use interactive cultural awareness strategies.** Miscommunication among staff due to cultural differences can interfere with performance. Use interactive cultural awareness exercises such as games, storytelling, group discussions, case studies, videotaping, and role-playing to improve understanding of different cultures.

Foster a Culture of Diversity

- **Create culturally themed events.** Incorporate diversity themes, cultural traditions, and ethnic customs into daily activities. One successful nursing home created an Asian unit for residents, serving Asian food, providing Asian

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newspapers every morning, and hiring bilingual physicians, nurses, and nursing assistants. Overall satisfaction increased dramatically—effective communication increased from 5 percent to 100 percent, meal satisfaction improved from 10 percent to 93 percent, and participation in recreation activities increased from 20 percent to 97 percent.

- **Encourage culturally diverse decorations.** Ask residents, family members, and staff to contribute photos, art, posters, and decorations to an international art gallery. Encourage residents to decorate their rooms with cultural motifs to help them feel at home.
- **Establish an international reading room.** Community organizations can donate books, maps, videos, and posters to create international reading rooms. Organize travel books and magazines by regions. Facilitate Internet access.
- **Create a cultural advisory committee.** Form a cultural advisory group to focus on workforce diversity issues. The committee can organize diversity events such as an annual picnic or an evening of food, music, and community. It can also promote diversity in trainings, organize ethnic and cultural holiday celebrations, and feature a different culture every month.
- **Hold “cultural conversations.”** Establish regular sessions where staff can discuss diversity issues. For example, lead group discussion on generational diversity, religious celebrations, cultural traditions, sexual orientation, disabilities, or cultural differences in dying. This helps staff respect different opinions and treat others as they would like to be treated.
- **Offer language classes.** Offer language classes in Spanish, English, Tagalog, and more. Students could obtain “facility credits” and attend quarterly “graduation” ceremonies.

References

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Impink, A. 2002. “Cultural sensitivity as a means of survival.” *Nursing Homes Magazine*.

Weiser, J. 2006. “Working with partners to hire in the community.” *Nursing Homes Magazine*.

Web Resources

Achieving Cultural Competence: A Guidebook for Providers of Services to Older Americans and Their Families www.aoa.gov/prof/adddiv/cultural/addiv_cult.asp

National Center for Cultural Competence
<http://gucchd.georgetown.edu/nccc>

National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) www.omhrc.gov/clas

Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute
www.paraprofessional.org

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