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Resources for Nursing Home Professionals

Staff Retention

When there is high turnover in a nursing home, quality of care is compromised because continuity of care is disrupted. Turnover increases stress on existing staff and drives up patient care costs through lost productivity, overtime costs, agency costs, and cost of recruitment. Research shows that staff retention is important for a facility because it leads to better quality care and a better bottom line. This Fast Fact presents strategies to help retain nursing home staff.

Support New Employees

- **Improve Selection Procedures.** Ensure that prospective employees receive a realistic view of the organization and the job. Offer to take them on a tour to meet other managers and peers. If possible, create an interaction with a resident or two and carefully watch the employee's body language and language skills. Immediately after the tour, retrace your steps and ask if any of the staff knows the individual. If yes, ask them for any advice as to whether or not they would be a good fit at your organization. During interviews, use behavior-based questions to probe for more details by asking the applicant—why, when, where, how, etc.
- **Establish a Welcome Team.** Set up a volunteer team so that new employees immediately feel comfortable and are introduced to key staff and patients. This helps new employees learn about policies and procedures, as well as the organization's culture. Use a mentor or buddy to help new employees become acquainted with the organization. Offer a monthly welcome breakfast for new hires to keep in touch with them.
- **Successful Orientation Is a Gradual Process.** An effective orientation is not completed the first day on the job. New staff learn for the first 90 days or more on the job. Orientation programs should be flexible and customized to the needs and experience level of the new hire. Some staff may need to slowly ramp-up to their responsibilities. For example, a newly certified nurse's aide will likely fail if given eight residents after five days of orientation. This new hire may need to start with 4 residents, then move up to six, etc. Keep in touch with new employees routinely for lunch or coffee for the first 2 to 3 months.

- **Develop an Interesting, Interactive, and Fun Program.** Make the first day a celebration. Orientation programs do not have to be dry, boring, or exhaustive. Avoid extensive lectures, tedious presentations of facts and figures, and interminable paperwork. Instead, use role-play exercises, induction games, multimedia, stories, brief videos, hands-on experiences, demonstrations, and interactive exercises. Get new staff out among the employees and introduce them.

Provide Education Beyond the Mandatory In-Services

- **Ensure Managers Are Learning to be Leaders.** Studies show that the opinion of an employee's immediate supervisor is more important than company policies or procedures. Ensure that all managers are well trained in leadership, retention strategies, and quality improvement. Purchase leadership books and create a book club requiring managers to read a chapter per week. An employee's relationship with their manager directly determines their productivity and length of stay in the facility. Monitor individual department turnover rates and hold managers accountable for lowering their turnover.
- **Ensure Inservice Program Is Interactive and Fun.** The Director of Staff Development or Director of Education should integrate the principles of adult education into the in-services program. Showing a video in a darkened room for an hour is not a learning activity. Ensure the manager in charge of education can participate in education regarding adult learners if necessary. After facility in-services, QI champions should go out on the units with the staff for a return demonstration. Finally, the education schedule should be driven by the QI committee and the data they are monitoring.

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- **Offer ESL Classes.** Leaders should help employees who need it to advance from their current position by offering English-as-a-second-language classes using community resources like a local community college. Organizations that consistently demonstrate that they care about their staff as people and encourage their personal growth have lower turnover rates.

Support and Motivate Employees

- **Reward High Performing Staff.** Establish employee recognition programs to keep employees motivated by giving them recognition for work well done. This may include Employee-of-the-Month awards, gift cards, financial awards, or other no-cost or low-cost ways to recognize staff for their excellent performance or hard work. Write staff thank you cards and mail the cards to their homes.
- **Offer Length-of-Stay Incentives.** Establish bonuses and incentives to encourage employees to stay with your organization. For example, give bonuses when a new CNA stays with your facility for 1, 2, or 3 years. Also offer anniversary bonuses for milestone years, such as 5 or 10 years.
- **Implement Consistent Assignment.** The common practice of rotating staff assignment is obsolete. All of the reasons used to defend the practice of rotating staff (preventing burnout, detection of clinical issues, fairness) have been proven, through numerous research studies, to be incorrect. Consistent assignment of staff to the same group of residents fosters strong relationships and efficiencies that leads to better clinical care, lower turnover rates, and higher satisfaction scores.
- **Empower Hands-On Staff.** After implementing consistent assignment, make sure CNAs participate in resident care conference meetings. Have the members of the interdisciplinary team direct their questions to the CNA. This empowers staff and makes them part of the solution.

References

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Wellman J. "Simple truths about staff retention." *Provider.* Sep 2002; 28(9):75-76, 79.

Web links

Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute
www.paraprofessional.org

Culture Change Now
www.culturechangenow.com

National Assoc. of Geriatric Nursing Assistants
www.nagna.org

As a result, they feel more valued and are an active part of the care team. Research shows that facilities where CNAs attend resident care conference meetings have lower CNA turnover rates.

- **Value Employees as Professionals.** Pay employees' membership for professional organizations like the National Association of Geriatric Nurse Assistants (NAGNA). Encourage them to take advantage of the resources provided by these organizations.

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