

Professional Development Opportunities as Staff Retention Tool in the Assisted Living Industry

Assisted living is booming. Along with this growth, there has been new challenges, one of which being staff attrition and turnover.

Assisted living operators are now focusing on professional development as a key strategy for ensuring that their employees remain with the facility after investing time in finding, hiring and training them.

Attrition and Turnover

No segment in long-term care is more deeply affected by turnover than assisted living. A recent University of California research report revealed that the number of workers leaving assisted living jobs is consistently outpacing all other industries, including skilled nursing care. Furthermore, Argentum's 2016 State of the Industry report found that the turnover rate for senior care careers is 45% for both full-time and part-time employees.

External workforce pressures loom larger every day and a booming economy is a double-edged sword for an assisted living industry that now finds itself trying to keep lower-wage workers from leaving to work for big box retailers.

Supply and Demand

Another prominent study by Argentum indicated that the assisted living industry will need to fill 1.4 million job openings by the year 2025. Of those hires, 281,000 will be for new jobs and more than 1 million will be to replace current workers who are either retiring or exiting the profession.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the long-term industry in general will need as few as 2.5 million new workers by 2030, with 30% of those needs coming from residential care facilities, a category BLS created to include assisted living.



Unfortunately, while the demand for new employees is rising, the supply of eligible job-hunters is flat. In January 2017, the industry was staring at 22,000 openings that were posted and went unfilled, according to OnShift, an industry workforce solutions company.

The National Center for Assisted Living (NCAL) also published data that indicates that the assisted living industry only employs about one-fifth of the long-term care workforce. Around 82% of the assisted living workforce is composed of nurses' aides or nurse assistants. Given the rising acuity of this segment, the largest demand going forward will likely be professional nurses.

With the increasingly complex landscape for staff retention, one solution utilized by many assisted living communities is to offer robust professional development opportunities to their staff.

Professional Development Efforts

While long-term caregivers are historically motivated by compassion over salary and benefits, changing demographics and priorities coupled with stiff competition for better conditions and pay elsewhere is forcing employers to rehabilitate key clinical positions. Many of these efforts center around credentialing, continuing education and a sharp focus around the creation of advancement opportunities from within.

Career Ladders

The presumption is simple: provide current employees with tangible and transparent paths to positions of greater responsibility, satisfaction, pay and benefits, and your retention rates will soar. Armed with the resources to do it, leading senior advocacy and member groups are finding new ways to revamp professional development and make the path to career advancement more transparent.

For example, LeadingAge's Center for Workforce Solutions, launched in 2017, is now focusing on a host of issues, including career pathway development. Similarly, NCAL and the American Health Care Association have jointly created a Workforce Resource Center to provide resources around recruitment and retention.

Argentum has launched Senior Living Works, a program focusing on career advancement. Its graduate employee ambassadors are called upon to address provider audiences about the benefits of senior living careers. The organization also launched a workforce metrics pilot to assimilate employment data from 80,000 employees in over 300 senior living communities in an effort to identify key hiring, turnover and retention issues, and quantify core competencies for common occupations and replicating best practices, said President and CEO James Balda to McKnight's Senior Living magazine.

Credentialing and Certification

Credentials and certifications are critical for advancements in professions like long-term care, and industry

leaders are actively working to provide greater access to opportunities.

Argentum's two-year-old independent Senior Living Certification Commission was formed to operate and maintain credentialing and certification processes. Its first effort was dedicated to assisted living community executive directors. Long term, the commission expects to develop ongoing certification programs for independent living executive directors and memory care.

Training and Education

Training and education provides caregivers with greater knowledge, and ultimately access to positions of greater responsibility and higher pay.

The accessibility of training and education programs has increased due to the proliferation of mobile technology applications, marking it as more accessible and flexible to achieve. Many programs also give workers the ability to track the progress of their certifications and more and more providers are allowing staff to tap into a host of online training and educational opportunities live streaming events, web-based learning tools, continuous learning platforms like blogs, podcasts and webinars, and software and video learning platforms.

Salary is only one tool for attracting and retaining great staff. Education, credentialing and career advancement all play a greater role than ever before. ValueMed University can be part of the staffing solution with 50+ online courses for on-demand training and classes specifically designed for nurses and CNAs. Contact us at ValueMed@PharMerica.com or 866-628-2583 to learn more.