



In brief: Life after COVID

The post-pandemic LTC workforce: 'COVID tested'

Welcome to Illuminate, our next-gen, interactive educational platform designed to inform professionals and key decision makers about the most important issues facing the industry today by shedding light on an ever-growing body of knowledge.

As the resident and workforce populations of senior living and nursing facilities dropped precipitously at Covid's eve, one large, established rehab therapy provider had an epiphany: she approached her furloughed therapists and coordinated with clients to offer them temporary jobs as direct care staff, many of whom went on to work as basic care assistants, dietary staff, housekeepers and memory care monitors.

It was a [moment](#) that showed resiliency of the people who do the messy work of long-term care. When the pandemic ends, a great deal of things will look the same.

The frail elderly will continue needing expert geriatric care. Foodservice kitchens and dining rooms will reopen. Bingo night will reclaim its rightful dominance on the activity

calendar. Families, friends and vendors will again take cars to visit and then leave.

Some residents will heal and age at home, while sadly, many will continue to get sick and, of course, pass on.

The most visible difference in this post COVID world will likely be in the caregivers themselves, many of whom will continue giving care but doing so in ways both subtle and overt.

In general

Changes in licensure rules for students and tenured nurses provided greater mobility to go where they were most needed, according to [nurse.org](#). Observers say the changes, among other things, elevated nursing even more by shining the light on skillsets specific to the various kinds of nursing specialties.

[Staffing firms responded to the pandemic](#) in a variety of ways. Some fast-tracked certification programs while another unveiled a novel Emergency Broadcast feature to connect needed caregivers with open positions.

Another positive effort is focusing on rebranding the role of certified nurse assistants by positioning it as a career, rather than an hourly job, according to [OnShift](#).

In the early days of the pandemic, scores of nursing homes nationwide were caught short-handed on critical supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE). More than 750 infection preventionists (IPs) told The Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology they were concerned about their facility's surge capacity and only slightly less about their facility's ability to provide safe care entering the so-called "twindemic" season of flu and COVID-19, as McKnight's [reported](#).

For most providers, the problem exposed providers' lack of supply management expertise. Workers have responded in a number of novel ways.

Connecticut, for example, ties enhanced reimbursement through the state to having PPE "shift coaches," who are tasked with ensuring that people are practicing proper donning and doffing techniques, said Steve Vera, CEO of Wachusett Healthcare in Quincy MA.

Todd Stewart, vice president, Enterprise Workflow Solutions, for CenTrak, told [Health Industry Today](#) that facilities would be well-served learning inventory management skills and techniques like asset management and sourcing.

Elevating the role of infection preventionist

As the pandemic raged, the CDC in June 2020 required large nursing homes (100 or more residents) and certain ventilator or hemodialysis service providers to have at least one on-site infection preventionist to manage COVID-19 care. Among other things, the IP is charged with developing policies and procedures, offering competency-based staff training and auditing protocol adherence, according to [published reports](#).

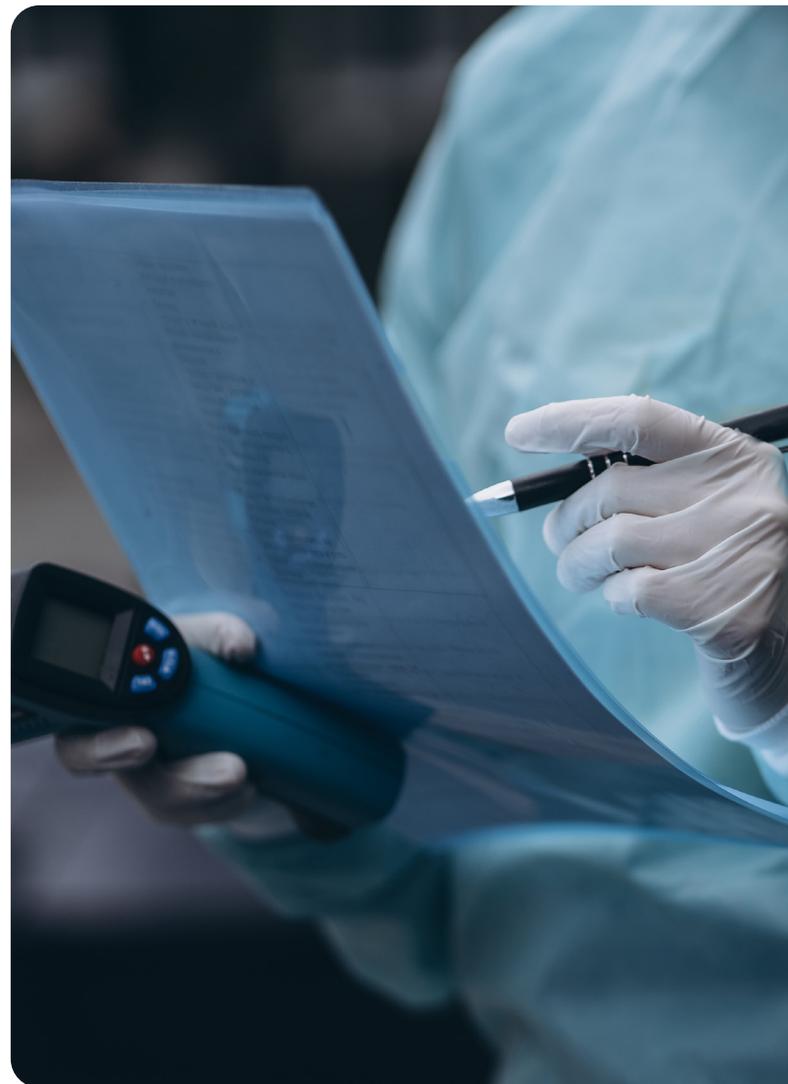
As infections grew, the industry responded to the need for fast-tracking education and resources around infection control.

"Infection preventionists working in long-term care facilities, including skilled nursing and assisted living facilities, need information and support to combat this deadly virus and keep residents safe," [said Elizabeth Garman](#), vice president, communications and practice resources for APIC, which provided board certified consultants and other resources on its Long-Term Care website.

Vera said preventionist hours on the job continue to grow, along with the level of enhanced monitoring they're required to do.

Jaan Sidorov, MD, CEO of PA Clinical Network and the former medical director of Geisinger Health Plan, told [Infection Control Today](#) he believes IPs are now part of larger team-based care efforts that include nurses, pharmacists and registered dietitians.

"While few post-acute care facilities have certified IPs, this pandemic has demonstrated the need for trained, certified, experts in this subject on the front lines making important decisions that could result in life or death," added Rosie Lyles, M.D., director of clinical affairs at Medline.





Uncertain days ahead

In its 2021 Forecast Report, Argentum predicts significant changes to the long-term care workforce, [OnShift notes](#).

For example, a selection of certified directors of assisted living (CDALs) the organization surveyed pointed to new prominence of some aspects of care. Associates now must be able to help alleviate top concerns like “improving socialization and avoiding social isolation, ensuring safety and infection prevention and control, providing emotional support for associates, helping staff take on flexible roles, staying in budgets for staffing and overtime, and the costs and time taken in testing, personal protective equipment, and now, vaccination programs.”

Meanwhile, most of the nursing home and senior living workforce are likely to remain intact when the pandemic ends, with a few notable exceptions.

But troubling trends are brewing. As HealthcareSource discovered in its [recent survey](#), the applicant pool overall in

long-term care is declining in nursing, but also in surprising places like food and environmental services. Positions are also taking much longer to fill.

For those hardened warriors in infection control, meanwhile, current trends are a worthy opponent.

“Though tough months lie ahead for infection preventionists and other healthcare professionals, hope remains that at some point in 2021 things will begin to settle down,” the Infection Control Today staff write in a [recent editorial](#). “In the end, it comes down to a simple formula: We win, COVID-19 loses.”

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