



## 6 Easy Ways to *Improve Operational Efficiencies* – And they All Start with Staff

If you want to improve operational efficiencies, you need to look no further than your staff. As Tighe Hamman, Vice President, Residential Services for Eskaton, said in the latest Spoonful of Sugar podcast, “We aren’t the experts. Our employees are.” He added, “Those employees who have stayed with us throughout the pandemic are strong groups, and they are creating their own efficiencies in their communities.”

Tighe and Robert Brandi, Vice President of Health Services for Eskaton, offered these tips for engaging staff to improve operational efficiencies:

- Shed nonessentials. Robert said, “COVID forced us to shed the nonessential tasks and activities that weren’t vitally important to patient care, especially early in the pandemic.” This included things like meetings that perhaps were useful but not critical. “We learned that we could function without some administrative tasks,” he said.
- Observe and trust your gut. Turnover costs time and money and is a drag on efficiency, so put some extra effort into hiring the right people. While a checklist of qualities and skills you’re seeking is valuable, Tighe suggested taking people on a tour of the facility during the interview. “See how they react to staff and interact with residents,” he offered. He added, “Gut feelings are important too. You can’t go wrong by listening to your gut.”
- Re-assess the scope of practice for positions. “When you get into a shortage situation, you start to realize that some tasks normally performed by a nurse or CNA don’t require someone with their licensure. Consider having those tasks performed by someone without those credentials and skill levels,” said Robert. This frees nurses and CNAs to focus on activities that require their specific skills, experience, and credentials and the direct patient care they love. It also maximizes opportunities for them to identify changes in condition and other issues before they escalate.

- Cross-train team members. When you’re short on staff, it’s an all-hands-on-deck situation. One way to increase efficiencies, said Tighe, is “cross-training staff to provide care and handle activities outside of their job description or department.” For instance, dietary staff can be trained to take vital signs, change bedding, sanitize surfaces, etc.
- Listen. “Staff generally know the most efficient ways to work in a system. It’s incredibly helpful to just listen to them,” said Robert, adding, “To engage frontline staff, make decisions as close to the bedside as possible.”
- Use technology, but judiciously. Technology can increase efficiencies, but it is important to weigh the return on investment. For example, Tighe said, “We are piloting a robot server in our CCRCs to bus tables. This type of technology can help with tasks that don’t require human interaction.” He explained, “When you look at the number of bodies being replaced by a robot, you find that these technologies can pay for themselves.” However, he cautioned, “You can’t replicate the human touch that is so important to our residents.”

Team members who may not be onsite every day are also vitally important. For example, the consultant pharmacists are essential to helping reduce medications and making med pass easier and more efficient. Robert added, “The pandemic is terrible, but it’s great to see how we all come together.”

*The Spoonful of Sugar podcast is an innovative partnership between PharMerica and McKnight’s. In each program, co-hosts T. J. Griffin, Vice President of Long Term Care Operations & Chief Pharmacy Officer at PharMerica, and John O’Connor, Vice President, Associate Publisher/Editorial Director of McKnight’s address the latest issues in long term care with leading experts and frontline providers, practitioners and others.*

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