



Strong Nurse Leaders Define the Future of Senior Living Care *New Leadership Series Helps Nurses Hone Leadership Skills*

Staffing shortages and burnout are issues for nurses across the board, but they're especially challenging for those in the senior living sector. Along with rising acuity rates, increasing complexity, and higher expectations, these strains are added threats to retention and morale.

> Leaders Build Strong Teams, Boost Morale

According to Tara Cortes, PhD, RN, Executive Director of the Hartford Institute of Geriatric Nursing (HIGN), Professor at NYU Meyers College of Nursing, and AALNA board member, giving nurses the opportunity to develop leadership skills may hold the key to building stronger teams and helping nurses recognize the value they bring to their organizations. "Leadership in senior living sets the culture," Cortes says. "It drives employee and resident satisfaction and raises the level of quality."

AALNA, founded in 2001, is the only national not-for-profit assisted living nursing association formed by nurses and operated by a board of nurses practicing in the field. Its mission is to promote nursing practice by enhancing the competencies of nurses working in assisted living.

Mandy Curtis, MSN, RN, CEO of Relate Innovations and Advisor to the AALNA board, adds that it's important not to confuse leadership with management. "Management is doing, overseeing the day-to-day," she says. "Leadership is the how. Leaders create the culture and bring the team together." It's also important to note that a nurse doesn't need to be in a management role to benefit from strengthening their leadership skills.

Leadership skills are especially critical in light of the changes emerging in the senior living sector. Practices implemented during the pandemic demonstrated the value of keeping patients out of the hospital whenever possible and providing care in the comfort of their homes instead. This means acuity and complexity are rising, and the demands on nurses caring for older adults are increasing. "Senior living is becoming much more complex," says Cortes. "It is not custodial care."

> Strong Leaders Embody Core Values

Both Cortes and Curtis agree that there are key values that are common to effective leaders: honesty, trust, inclusivity, and caring. The first step to developing leadership skills is understanding these core values and why they're so important. Effective leaders embody these values and lead by example, solidifying their teams, building morale, and, ultimately, improving the quality of care they provide.

"These values are the underpinning of person-centered care, which involves caring, respect, and engagement for both residents and staff," notes Cortes.

> Elevating Senior Living Nursing

As nurses hone their leadership skills and model core values, they begin to recognize the value they bring to their patients and their teams. Curtis hopes this helps elevate senior living nursing and that new nurses and nursing students will consider it as career choice.

"We should all be okay with assisted living nurses being ambitious and learning how to have a seat at the table on their team, in their community, or in their organization, and influencing the direction and

continued on page two



> Elevating Senior Living Nursing (Cont.)

outcomes for resident care services throughout the industry,” says Curtis. “It’s more important than ever for nurses to understand that their voice and practice matters in assisted living. Leadership training help them put this into action.”

> HIGN Clinical Leadership Series

AALNA recognized that leadership education specific to assisted living nursing was not widely available. “Without training, many assisted living nurses have to learn leadership by trial and error or by mirroring what they see and experience,” says Curtis. To overcome this gap, AALNA created a Clinical Leadership Program Committee, which Curtis chairs, to identify resources that better support the professional growth of all assisted living nurses.

This led to a partnership with HIGN, a globally recognized organization dedicated to shaping the quality of healthcare for older adults, and use of their practice-agnostic leadership series. The series, which is appropriate for LVNs/LPNs as well as RNs, delivers best-in-class education and training that goes beyond what typically has been available to assisted living nurses. “Having a high-quality partner like HIGN and the high-quality content offered through the leadership series is important for AALNA to provide to its members,” says Curtis.

This leadership series is an opportunity for professional development for assisted living nurses so they can maximize their impact and influence and be intentional as they build successful careers. The series curriculum includes topics like communication, managing in times of crises, creating a culture of respect, and shared decision making. It is open to all AALNA members and registration information can be found on AALNA’s website at www.alnursing.org.

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