

Staffing Shortages: 6 Steps to Turn the Tide

A nursing shortage was predicted as early as 2010 and nurse aides have been at a premium since 2018. Since the pandemic, there have been 420,000 jobs lost in SNF and ALF. Today, there are more vacancies and a smaller pool to draw from. And it is likely to worsen: the average age for nurses is 58 and there are fewer nursing students – and nursing instructors to train them – to replace them as they retire. Retention is also an issue, as nurses leave the industry due to burnout and frustration.

6 Steps to Turning the Tide

1

Focus on culture

Evaluating your facility's culture starts by asking some questions:

- What kind of culture exists in your facility?
- Who drives your culture?
- What drives your culture?
- What keeps your staff coming to work?
- What motivates your staff?

2

Solicit feedback

To fully assess your culture, you'll need to measure it. Informal interviews (not surveys!) are an effective way to assess what's working and what's not. Ask your staff what motivates them to come to work every day, what would make their jobs better, what they like about their jobs, and what would make them stay longer.

3

Get serious about onboarding

Make sure new hires receive a thorough orientation that's tailored to their role and level of experience. A guardian angel or buddy program that provides regular check-ins is an effective way to support new employees.

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Invest in training

For CNAs: CNAs feel the same burnout and want respect and inclusion from leadership. Classes and other continuing education opportunities are a great way to help them understand the value of their role while advancing their careers. Consider bringing instructors into the facility or teaming up with other facilities to offer group classes.

For DONs: Facilities are experiencing the highest turnover rates ever for DONs. It's critical that they have the right training when they're hired, especially for hospital nurses transitioning to SNF. Expectations should be communicated upon hire and administration should plan to problem solve to prevent DONs from working as staff nurses as much as possible. Encourage them to join a DON group, like NADONA, for peer support and to pursue certification – certified DONs are known to have fewer deficiencies.

5

Improve efficiencies

Look for ways to improve efficiencies to make everyone's job easier and help prevent burnout. Consider total implementation of electronic records and bringing on unit clerks to manage the unit desk and help with orders. Medication assessment can also help – look at the times medications are given, whether all the meds are necessary, and if nurses are following policy around timing. Unit dose packaging is easier to monitor, prevents diversion, and can even save money if returns are allowed.

6

Consider new perks

If possible, you may want to offer tuition assistance and benefits like holiday pay or extra PTO. Giveaways for not calling in, taking only approved overtime, or as a reward for a "caught in the act" type program are also valuable motivators.

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