



Expert Insights From
Joanie Antico, RN, Director of Clinical Services at Wachusett Healthcare Management Company

Navigating challenges and seizing opportunities are all in a day's work for Joanie Antico, RN, Director of Clinical Services at Wachusett Healthcare Management Company. "We have stable leadership, a full staff, and 90% occupancy," she said, adding, "We've recently increased our overall Five-Star rating in one of our buildings and increased our Quality Measure Star ratings in three others. These are some proud moments that we think speak to our commitment to quality nursing care and rehabilitation, and improving the outcomes for all our residents."

Quality Takes a Team

Investing in her team is a priority for Antico. She said, "We do our best to bubble wrap new employees and get them settled in so they stay. We've made a commitment to do a better job with onboarding and orientation. We connect new people with peer-to-peer partners." She added, "Our staff are superstars, and we've created a culture where everyone feels valued and appreciated. It's important that everyone's engaged from the receptionist at the front door to the housekeepers to the nurses. I think our culture is one reason we're retaining more staff."

When you have a good team, she observed, you can make great things happen. Two of her buildings received AHCA/NCAL's Bronze Quality Awards recently and will go for the Silver. Additionally, she said, "We're working on more systematic company-wide quality improvement projects, including implementation of a process to

reduce unnecessary hospitalizations that has already resulted in fewer readmissions. And we are looking at AI tools to help make the process even more effective."

Medication Management Takes Center Stage

Quality improvement isn't possible without addressing medication and related issues, such as psychotropic use and falls, Antico noted. "The consultant pharmacist is right on target to do new admission medication reviews, as well as interim medication reviews related to falls and other issues. They use their insights and expertise, for example, to see things from a different perspective and identify something that may have been missed. They help mitigate issues, and they lend a great hand, whether it's in their monthly reviews, providing specialized education to our nurses, or other efforts. They also help us create a balance between the therapeutic and medication needs of residents while helping with cost containment and medication optimization. They're an integral part of our team."

Another key to quality, she noted, is a proactive approach to care; and this requires a well-oiled interdisciplinary team that includes the pharmacist.

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Expert Insights From Joanie Antico, Continued

For instance, she said, “Our consultant pharmacists contribute to our behavior team meetings along with our psychiatric providers so we can identify risks ahead of time and resolve issues before they cause problems.”

30 Years of Learning

Antico has been a nurse for over 30 years, and she said, “Being flexible and able to quickly adapt has gotten me from 1990 to today. It’s also been helpful to be open-minded—I don’t know everything, and there’s always someone who might have a better way to do something.” She added, “I try to see every day as a lesson to be learned.”

Some of her success as a team leader and clinician, she said, comes from “my ability to hear the message regardless of how it’s delivered. People may be angry or passionate about what they’re trying to tell you, but you need to be able to listen to the message and really hear what they’re saying.” This, along with her commitment to lead by doing, has helped her build trust with staff and enable them all to be successful.

Antico wouldn’t change the road she’s walked. “Long-term care is a field that gets in you. Either you love it or you don’t. If you love it, the desire to provide excellent care is second nature,” she said.



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