

Reducing Staff Burden in Senior Living Communities: *Practical Strategies to Improve Retention*

Senior living communities across the country are facing a common challenge: how to provide exceptional resident care while managing staffing shortages, increasing resident acuity, and growing regulatory requirements. As workloads increase, organizations must look beyond traditional staffing solutions and focus on operational strategies that reduce burden, improve efficiency, and strengthen staff satisfaction.

Fortunately, there are several proven approaches that can help communities support caregivers while enhancing resident outcomes.

Streamline medication management

Medication administration is one of the most time-intensive responsibilities for nursing staff. Complex medication regimens, frequent monitoring requirements, and documentation demands can create inefficiencies that contribute to stress and burnout. According to medication management



experts, streamlining the medication pass process can improve staff efficiency, reduce workload stress, and enhance residents' quality of life.

Communities can begin by evaluating opportunities to reduce unnecessary medications, simplify administration schedules, and eliminate monitoring practices that no longer affect treatment decisions. Medication optimization initiatives, including deprescribing when clinically appropriate, can reduce the number of daily medication passes and associated documentation requirements.

Operational improvements also make a significant difference. Organized medication carts, standardized restocking procedures, reduced interruptions during medication passes, and the use of technologies such as electronic medication administration records (eMARs) can help nurses work more efficiently and safely. Regular team huddles and ongoing competency training further support smooth workflows.

Leverage the expertise of consultant pharmacists

One often under-utilized resource in senior living is the consultant pharmacist. These professionals bring specialized expertise in geriatric medication management and can serve as valuable partners in reducing care team burden.

Consultant pharmacists conduct medication regimen reviews, identify potential medication-related issues, recommend safer or more cost-effective therapies, and support chronic disease management. They also provide staff education, assist with regulatory compliance, and help develop policies related to medication administration and management.

By collaborating closely with pharmacists, communities can identify opportunities to reduce polypharmacy, prevent adverse drug events, and streamline medication administration processes. Pharmacists can also support initiatives such as fall prevention, behavioral management, antibiotic stewardship, and immunization programs, reducing

the clinical workload on frontline staff while improving resident outcomes.

As resident acuity continues to rise, pharmacist involvement can enhance interdisciplinary collaboration and help communities deliver safer, more efficient care. Pharmacists who participate in care planning, medication goal setting, and routine reviews can contribute to better resident outcomes while helping reduce operational complexity for staff.

Focus on staff satisfaction and well-being

Reducing burden is not solely about operational efficiency. It also requires creating a workplace culture that supports employees and helps prevent burnout.

Research highlights that healthcare workers are particularly vulnerable to stress due to staffing shortages, around-the-clock coverage needs, and the demands of direct resident care. While financial incentives such as bonuses, additional paid time off, and wage increases may help, they are often not enough on their own to reduce burnout. Organizations achieve better results when they combine external rewards with strategies that address employees' intrinsic needs.

Three key areas deserve particular attention:

1. Align around shared values

Employees who feel their personal values align with those of their organization and leadership

tend to report higher job satisfaction and loyalty. Establishing a strong mission and helping staff connect their work to meaningful outcomes can reduce stress and provide purpose during challenging times.

2. Strengthen communication

Clear, consistent communication builds trust and transparency. Studies have shown a direct relationship between communication quality and burnout levels among staff. Regular updates, explanations behind organizational decisions, and effective communication training can help employees feel informed, respected, and engaged.

3. Promote mindfulness and resilience

Mindfulness practices, including gratitude, positive reframing, meditation, and stress-management techniques, can help staff build resilience and better navigate workplace challenges. When employees feel supported and valued, they are more productive, engaged, and committed to providing high-quality care.

A team-based approach to sustainable success

There is no single solution to reducing staff burden in senior living. The most successful communities take a comprehensive approach that combines workflow optimization, clinical expertise, employee engagement, and ongoing collaboration.

By streamlining medication management, leveraging consultant pharmacists, improving communication, and fostering a culture of support and well-being, senior living organizations can create a more sustainable work environment. The result is reduced stress for caregivers, improved retention, greater operational efficiency, and, most importantly, better outcomes and quality of life for residents.

Sources:

- uspharmacist.com/article/addressing-medication-overload

Interviews with:

- Charla Evans, Director of Strategic Accounts, PharMerica
- Matthew Palmer, Senior Director of Clinical Operations, PharMerica
- Caroline Garvey, Director of Clinical Operations, PharMerica