

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

MANAGEMENT: Follow These Facilities' Leads to Boost Staff Retention

2 organizations drill down to what keeps their employees on the job.

One-size-fits all approaches to improving staff levels can backfire by causing even more employees to stomp off for happier working grounds. So you have to do your homework to figure out how to fix staffing levels in your individual facility.

Case in point: When Mary Wade Home took a close look at the factors driving staff attrition there, it came up with a surprising finding, says **David V. Hunter**, CEO of the facility in New Haven, Conn. That is, staff who'd been with the facility for seven to 10 years reported lower job satisfaction than newer employees, he reports. Digging deeper, Hunter and his team zeroed in on why: The facility needed to ramp up opportunities for career development. So the organization focused on providing education that paves the way for job advancement, including higher salaries. Examples include:

A certified med tech course for the facility's CNAs, which allows them to administer medications in Connecticut nursing homes. Once the CNAs complete the program, they receive a raise, Hunter relays.

Additional training on the geriatric population's needs. The content is more advanced than what someone might get in a CNA or CMT program.

Training on organization skills, conflict management, and career development. The latter causes people to do one of two things, says Hunter. "They either get serious about advancing their career through our programs -- or if they always wanted to be a lab tech or X-ray tech, etc., they finally go do that. And that's good for them and for us, too, if they didn't really want to be doing their job in our facility."

Today, the facility keeps tabs on employee satisfaction -- and factors that lead to attrition -- in two ways. For one, it conducts exit interviews and takes what people say "very seriously," says Hunter. The facility also has an outside company survey employees about their job satisfaction every three to four years. Then the facility uses that information to plan ahead for the next couple of years, he reports.

Reaping the reward: As a result of the facility's efforts, its attrition rate dropped from about 45 to 48 percent at the outset of the initiative to under 20 percent for the past three years, Hunter says.

Get a Bigger Bang for the Buck

Birchwood Terrace found it was spending more than \$1 million annually on a variety of staffing "incentives" and turnover costs, notes **Barbara Frank**, a consultant who presented the facility's experience with a staffing quality improvement initiative in an Advancing Excellence webinar. Yet the staffing situation remained dire.

And when the facility administration took a closer look at what was going on, they found that the perks it was providing were actually causing some of the staffing problems.

For one, the facility offered sign-on bonuses that actually rewarded people for taking the job and then the money and leaving, Frank tells **Eli**. And the facility was paying extra for people to work when others called in sick. It also had a "Baylor" program where caregivers could work two 12-hour shifts per week and get paid for 30 hours.

The net result is that "staff could earn more working [on a per diem basis] and get bonuses for picking up extra shifts when the facility was short," Frank explains. And this "created resentment among the 'steady Eddys' who always showed up for their shifts" and, as a result, received less payment than those who got the bonus. "The facility also had the majority of its licensed nurses working part-time," Frank adds. Yet those are the people who provide supervision and

continuity of care in the facility, she points out.

Smart strategies: The facility eliminated the sign-on bonus and gave staff who agreed to work fulltime a 20 percent raise, Frank relays. The facility also traded the sign-on bonuses for retention and referral bonuses. And the administration starting paying more attention to the quality of people hired, and how it welcomed new staff.

"Now the facility has full-time nurses and a stack of applications from licensed nurses who want to work there," Frank reports.