

Long-Term Care Survey Alert

Staff Recruitment: THINK 'OUT OF THE BOX' TO ATTRACT, KEEP STAFF

If your facility has a staffing crisis or high turnover, it's time to get a recruitment and retention committee in high gear. Such efforts may convince surveyors to hold off on writing a staffing tag.

Nursing facilities have to "think out of the box" to attract and keep good staff these days, emphasizes **Patricia Boyer**, a nursing consultant with the Milwaukee office of **BDO Seidman**. Through her ongoing research on nursing home staffing, Boyer is seeing facilities use some simple, yet effective strategies to boost recruitment and retention.

"Facilities can't control reimbursement for staffing or health benefit costs," Boyer notes. "But there are some no cost or inexpensive things they can do to make life easier and less stressful for employees. At the same time, the facility administration is showing its employees that it values them."

Provide 'A La Carte' Amenities

Many facilities are providing creative amenities as a recruitment and retention tool. For example, as part of her research, Boyer encountered one facility that allows staff to choose from a menu of timesavers, such as getting the facility to handle their dry cleaning or vehicle's oil changes while they tend to resident care.

Amenities should target barriers to good performance and employees' longevity, advises **Patty Jamison**, principal of **Innisfree Healthcare Associates** in Plymouth, MI. In long-term care facilities, these obstacles commonly include child care, elder care and transportation. To ease transportation hassles, a facility might purchase bus tickets to sell to employees, so they don't have to stand in line or provide the tickets as part of a benefit package.

Some facilities are offering certified day care within their own centers. "Facilities can start their own day care centers cost effectively by converting existing space and using volunteers as child care workers," Jamison suggests.

"The use of amenities as incentives actually pays for itself in the long run," observes **Laura Fain**, DON at **Leesburg Regional Medical Center Nursing Center** in Leesburg, FL. "The facility will usually find it has lower turnover, as a result, and isn't spending money on nonproductive staff time."

Leesburg Regional Nursing Center, which reports a staffing turnover rate far below the national average, offers activities designed to stir up the usual routine or motivate staff to strive for perfect attendance or getting "caught" doing something extra.

Some of the perks include:

1. A "perfect attendance" lottery. Staff who don't miss any days during the six-month winter season in Florida get a free tote and beach bag. Their names also go into a lottery for extravagant vacation giveaways, such as numerous three-day cruises and a several-day stay at the posh Atlantis Resort in Nassau, Bahamas. The lottery also includes movie tickets.
2. Cash for unused sick time. Staff can "cash in" on a monthly basis.
3. Free meals and sundaes for staff on every shift once every three months during a special "employee" day where staff wears their Leesburg Regional T-shirts. "Free food goes to everyone's heart," Fain notes.

4. A "reward dollars" program. Administrators hand out the paper bucks when they see staff do something extra that's not part of their job. Employees can use them to buy products with the facility logo on them or certificates to popular restaurants, flowers and movie tickets.
5. A "shining star" program. Patients and families recommend employees for this special award. Recipients receive a 14-karat star to wear on their name badge.
6. Glamour shots. "Staff paid \$10 for the makeup samples and pictures. It was great fun," Fain reports.

Leesburg also offers a sign-on bonus and a scholarship and tuition reimbursement program for anyone from CNAs to nurses to administrators to further their education, Fain adds.

While these ideas certainly could give a boost to any workplace, in Jamison's view, any incentive program should be "icing on the cake."

"It is popular to talk about rewards and there is no doubt that staff appreciate being recognized for a job well done," Jamison notes. "But the recognition means little if the job is not rewarding in and of itself. A living wage, flexible hours, opportunity for growth and an open dialogue with administration lends much more weight to rewards and incentives." Boyer agrees: "A facility can go a long way toward attracting and keeping staff by making itself 'the place' to work in an area due to its innovative care programs, its reputation in the community and how it treats staff."