

## MDS Alert

### Working in LTC: Avoid Burnout With These Tips

#### Keep team members happy, healthy, and productive.

Both management and individual employees can have a huge impact on team member happiness and facility morale. Keeping employees healthy, happy, and feeling empowered goes a long way to reduce burnout and turnover and could even increase the quality of care team members provide.

#### Design Policies and Culture to Empower

Help each team member feel like they have the information, training, and ability to excel in their roles in your facility.

#### Make Policies Clear

For example, the long-term care industry's regulations and norms are complicated, especially for employees new to their careers or even to your facility.

All team members should feel like they have the information they need to do their jobs effectively, as well as answer questions from residents or other team members. While it should not fall on individual employees to have or provide all of the answers about medical care or when a resident will be discharged, employees may feel disheartened to be asked questions like this constantly without knowing the answers. Effective and transparent communication can help.

**Justin Johnson**, a physical therapist who's worked at more than 20 SNFs and long-term care facilities, has specific advice for facilities to help reduce therapist burnout:

- Inform your therapists on how billing and RUG levels are set.
- Give concise updates on discharge plans and the barriers to discharge (even if they don't have to do with therapy).
- Establish a policy to help residents easily access information about the next time a resident will see a facility physician, including the time and date.

With therapy being a particularly important source of revenue for many facilities - and a focus for fraud » » » investigators (see story page 45), management should make sure that therapy team members are especially well-informed. These insights underscore how communicating with employees helps them provide better care for residents and feel better about their role in providing that care.

Management should also consider asking for employee input when crafting policies that will affect them directly. For example, cell phones can become a big issue for facilities because unethical employees can easily use them to invade residents' privacy, as well as personal cell phones causing employees distractions throughout the workday. Management will get more employees on board with a new or updated cell phone policy if you ask them their opinions and recommendations on how personal cell phones should be used while at work.

Studies have also shown that team members of all credentials and status provide better care for residents when they're involved in planning that care. New regulations concerning the interdisciplinary care team mandate more voices and a diversity of roles in the care planning process, and management and staff should embrace the possibilities that arise out of valuing team members' voices and ideas.

With surveyors increasing their evaluation of staffing per the Requirements of Participation, pressures on individual employees and facilities will only increase.

### **Individuals Can Ward off Burnout**

Individual employees can learn or use best practices to reduce stress at work and improve their day-to-day experience.

The long-term care industry is built around caregiving, and that requires a lot of individuals - physically, mentally, and emotionally. The toll only grows over time. Build in moments throughout your work day to take a break. For example, though you may feel pressured to catch up on paperwork during lunch, you will probably feel happier and actually be more productive if you treat your lunch break like a real break. Take time you might usually spend doing paperwork or checking your phone to take a quick walk outside or even meditate at your desk.

Feeling like you have a network of support also helps. While your colleagues best understand the pressures and realities of day-to-day work in the long-term care industry, it's difficult to get a break from those stressors if your network is only colleagues. Do everything you can to support one another throughout the workday, including being genuinely interested in their lives outside of work if that feels appropriate. If your colleagues have kids and are on a weird shift where they don't get to spend as much time with their families, acknowledging that can help strengthen workplace bonds.

If your facility has a turnover problem, consider implementing a formal or informal mentorship program to help new team members learn the ropes and feel confident in their roles. A mentorship relationship shouldn't feel like an obligation, but rather a safe space to help team members communicate their experiences and expectations, as well as provide more consistent care and results.