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Proactive Partnership

Mather Pavilion's gerontological training results in 36 percent decrease in turnover.

By Robin Hocevar

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The concept of patient-centered sounds simple enough. However, despite the purest intentions, anyone in healthcare knows constant staff turnover makes it virtually impossible to deliver personalized care to nursing home residents.

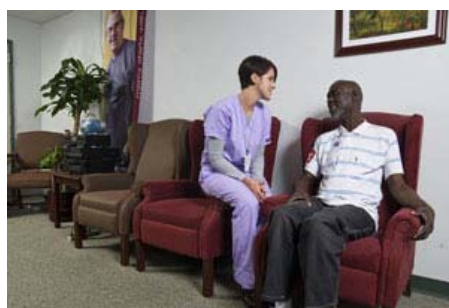
A decade ago, Mather Pavilion, a residential nursing care community in Evanston, IL, epitomized the classic conundrum in long-term care. In 2002, staff turnover rates were about 46 percent. With the constant change in caregivers, staff never had the opportunity to develop relationships with patients and families, much less include them as partners on a care team.



Wanting to find solutions for an industry-wide problem, Mather LifeWays Institute on Aging selected the Evanston facility to pilot the Learn, Empower, Achieve, Produce (LEAP) program. The LEAP program educated Mather Pavilion's nurses to be gerontological nurse specialists, while CNAs developed clinical, communication, teambuilding and mentoring skills as part of a clinical ladder program to advance in their field.

In 2010, the facility was the only one in Illinois ever to receive Long Term Living magazine's OPTIMA award for being proactive to provide exceptional care. Nurse administrators credit LEAP - and the consequential decrease in turnover to 10 percent in 2007 - as key to their success.

Family Partnership



At the heart of LEAP is the now popular concept of patient-centered care. As director of nursing, Ann Marie Caunian, BSN, RN, taught her staff by example.

"When staff sees residents on a day-to-day basis, they start seeing their day as a series of tasks like give two baths, feed them and go home," she explained. "I tell them to look at each resident as an individual and give them choices. Now, the residents have choices in their food and clothing."

The connection between staff, patients and families is empathized in the LEAP program as

well.

"We knew how to work with residents," said Joyce Garcia, CNA. "LEAP gave us the information on working with family members if, for example, they'd come up to us and say the patient's dentures or clothes are missing. Now, we greet the families instead of running from them. We try to meet their needs and, if things are missing, we can convince them that we're doing our best."

From a management point of view, Caunian said the staff/family collaboration goes a long way toward consistency.

"It's a great feeling seeing staff and families chatting in our hallway," she said. "It's because of LEAP that they're

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close and we're able to provide consistency. We try to provide permanent staff on each floor so these relationships can develop. If there are different nurses and CNAs every day, there's no chance for a relationship."

Growing Leaders

It's not just the new friendships with families that keep nurses and CNAs from leaving. Mentorship is a key element of LEAP.

Experienced CNAs serve as counselors for new employees. In this capacity, the seasoned CNA teaches new hires about patient-centered care.

"Even if they move to another floor, we follow up and see how the new job is going," said Garcia. "We make sure the transition is smooth for the new job. We need CNAs so we treat them like family and make sure they're doing right by the residents."

A simple thank you goes a long way too. Management recognizes CNAs and nurses by writing letters of appreciation to newly promoted employees and posting kudos on the staff bulletin board.

For their part, residents expressed their appreciation too in the form of 98 percent satisfaction ratings.

For Garcia, the gratitude from corporate management is nice but, the vote of confidence from the residents makes all the difference.

"If you're consistent with the resident, you're going to know when something's wrong," she simplified.

Robin Hocevar is senior regional editor at ADVANCE.

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