

# Consistent Staffing Benefits Resident, Staff

*Instead of 2-week rotations, consider assigning caregivers to same residents for longer periods.*

BY CAROLE BULLOCK

FORT WORTH, TEX. — Consistent assignments of nursing home staff to the same residents enhances resident-centered care and improves staff morale compared with rotating assignments, reported David Farrell, MSW, LHNA, who spoke at a meeting about the Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes campaign, which marked its first-year milestone.

More than 200 administrators, nurses, and industry leaders convened to provide updates on the campaign's progress and to share best practices for nursing home care.

The volunteer campaign challenges providers to track progress on at least three of eight measurable quality goals: reducing physical restraint use, reducing pain for long- and short-stay residents, and reaching outcomes goals—including improving quality of care through staff retention.

"For improving quality, we have examined the literature, and there is more and more research supporting the adoption of consistent assignment, said Mr. Farrell,

director of care continuum at San Francisco-based Lumetra, a health care consulting organization. "Research supports that residents living in nursing homes with consistent assignment in place received significantly higher ratings of personal appearance and hygiene than did residents in rotating assignment homes, and nurse aides working in consistent-assignment homes reported higher job satisfaction than did those working in rotating assignment homes."

According to Mr. Farrell, most nursing homes rotate certified nursing assistant (CNA) assignment to residents every 2 weeks or sometimes monthly. But he said he advocates consistent assignment so that the same caregivers care for the same residents 85% of the time.

In his presentation, Mr. Farrell also said staff turnover costs nursing homes about \$2.5 billion annually. "With every quit or termination, the caregiving relationships and quality of the services provided to elders is disrupted. At the extreme, staffing can become so compromised that the well-being of both residents and the caregivers is negatively affected."

Consistent assignments reduce turnover as staff members form close relationships with the residents and with each other. "They really get to know the residents and become the experts on a group of residents; everyone knows that they can go to them for answers. This is empowering and boosts caregivers' self-esteem," he said.

"Studies have repeatedly confirmed that residents and their family members value the quality of the relationships they have



Research shows residents who live in homes with consistent staffing have higher ratings of personal appearance and hygiene.

—Mr. Farrell

with the front-line caregivers more highly than the quality of the medical care and the quality of the food," he said.

Nationwide, there are 1.4 million CNAs, and they deliver 80% of hands-on care; 90% are women, 50% are nonwhite, and most are single mothers at or below poverty level, according to Lumetra.

But the high turnover which plagues nursing homes is not just the result of low pay for caregivers.

In a study examining high turnover (*J. Gerontol. Nurs.* 2003;29:36-43), factors associated with high turnover include leadership issues, career shifts, and staff scheduling practices, he said.

Mr. Farrell outlined 10 key strategies to reduce staff turnover and implement consistent assignments:

▶ Allow staff to trade days, even at the last minute. "The schedule may look like a mess, but the goal is to fill the shifts and

prevent being understaffed. As an added benefit, you've allowed the staff to do favors for one another and this builds trust among the staff," he said.

▶ Empower employees by giving them knowledge of what is expected, the supplies and resources to do their jobs, and the opportunity to improve work processes and systems of care.

▶ Have an Employee Assistance Program in place.

▶ Help staff resolve the barriers in their lives which prevent them from coming to work.

▶ Indicate staff assignments on the master schedule. "By indicating which assignment a CNA is working on in the master schedule, you have eliminated that chaotic moment at the beginning of each shift when the CNAs are standing around the nursing station waiting for the charge nurse to give them their assignments," Mr. Farrell said.

▶ Reward and educate staffing coordinators. Meet with these staff members regularly, support them and reward them for preventing understaffed schedules.

▶ Try to increase the number of full-time staff while decreasing the number of part-time workers.

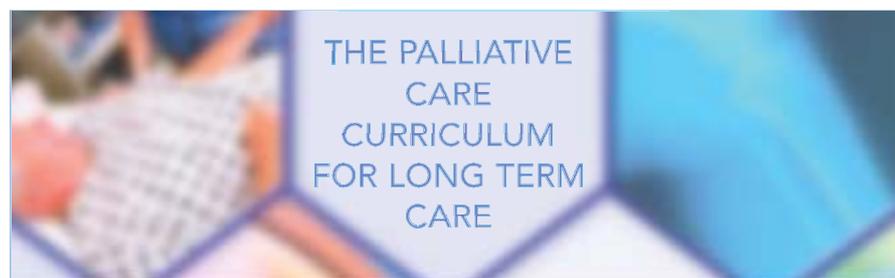
▶ Provide strong work/life programs, which are a powerful way for companies to attract and retain good employees.

▶ Recognize good behavior, rather than consistently focusing on and criticizing wrong behaviors.

▶ Establish eye contact, smile, and greet employees, residents, physicians, and visitors as you walk through the facility.

In addition, Mr. Farrell said, consistent assignments allow for staff to notice the subtle clinical changes in residents early. "This is essential to delivering high quality care," he added.

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## Quality Initiative

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Foundation showed that only 12% of respondents strongly agreed that nursing homes in the United States provide quality care for their residents.

Still, progress is being made to meet ongoing challenges and continue to improve quality in long-term care.

"There are different ways to ensure quality," said Dr. Koren. As an example of commitment to quality, she cited the Advancing Excellence in Nursing Homes campaign. In its first year, the initiative has drawn more than 6,000 long-term care providers, caregivers, government officials, medical experts, quality improvement experts, and consumers. AMDA was one of the founding partners of the campaign when it was launched in 2006.

The goal of the initiative is to improve the public's trust in long-term care facilities by committing to quality improvement and accountability via voluntary progress reports on goals dealing with clinical out-

comes such as pain reduction and organizational issues such as staff turnover.

Prior to the initiative, AMDA used the language from OBRA to develop position statements for the roles of medical directors and to determine how physicians could raise standards and improve care. The association also used OBRA as leverage to create a specialized set of CPT codes for nursing homes that was accepted by Congress and the American Medical Association.

"I think the OBRA recognition of the role of the physician and the clinical aspects of care was a validation of what AMDA was doing," Executive Director Lorraine Tarnove said in an interview. "Finally they were talking about clinical issues." Consequently, an important legacy of OBRA is that the commitment to quality long-term care from many organizations is more concrete, Ms. Tarnove said, because there are quality indicators that are more concrete.

Heidi Splete is a senior writer with Elsevier Global Medical News.