



Here's the Key to Ending the Nurse Revolving Door

By Susan Saldibar

Could one way to retain your skilled nurses be to lower the number of acute need residents?

According to [SoftVu](#) this is a viable equation to increase nurse retention. And they have the numbers to support that view. Consider this from a report on nursing fatigue and injury, cited in a recent SoftVu article:

- Nurses report consistent muscle/joint pain and compassion fatigue.
- 44% of lost days are due to strains and sprains.
- 10% of all back injuries are directly correlated to the physicality of moving residents.

Why? As the article points out, “Most nurses equate these injuries to job burn out and a vicious cycle – a shortage of staff making it difficult to adequately care for the residents in their communities causing more burn-out, more turnover and less staff to care for residents.”

Is a shortage of staff caring for really sick patients why good people leave?

SoftVu did some research (and some math) on the impact of an “unrealistic workload” on retention. It was pretty interesting. Here's what they found:

- 1 in 5 newly graduated nurses in their first year leave due to an unrealistic workload.
- Of those who stay, 1 in 3 leave by end of second year.
- The turnover cost for a nurse can be as high as 30% of annual salary, when hiring bonuses, training, certification and ramp up period are calculated (Relias Learning).

That “unrealistic workload” comes about as nurses deal with a) more residents and b) challenging, acute need residents.

A troubling “sign of the times” that requires action.

SoftVu makes the point that senior living community operators are caught up in an uncomfortable conundrum of relying upon acute need residents to fill rooms, yet struggling to attain reasonable nurse-to-resident ratios. And a revolving door of nurses coming and going only serves to further erode the bottom line.

Part of this is a sign of the times as senior living communities face a changing demographic landscape, with technology advances enabling seniors to remain at home longer. But SoftVu makes it clear that it is too simplistic to assume that this is just a tide to be ridden out. Those who hunker down may be sidelined by more agile, nimbler communities who can find ways to attract lower acuity residents and provide more acceptable ratios to nurses and other staff members.

Lots of hand wringing, but where are the solutions?

Much has been written about attracting healthier residents. But many resist solutions. SoftVu’s article describes common complaints such as “We’ve tried this and we are still getting the same results.” Or, “We have our ideal resident built into our PPC audience and our SEO strategy is strong, yet we’re still getting residents with the need for a higher level of care. Why?”

The solution to all the hand wringing, according to SoftVu, lies in changing the way operators approach the quest for fresh leads. In a nutshell, it involves moving away from the frantic scramble for low hanging fruit and getting out in front of the move-in curve. Without giving away any of their “secret sauce” here are the basic elements:

- Start with a smaller, deeper and more accurate database of healthier prospective residents (SoftVu uses over 250 data points for its database of 82 million people)
- Develop a strategy to target those individuals with intelligent marketing programs that:
 - Provide highly personalized messaging that speaks to their specific situations
 - Encourage interaction with residents who are still living independently
 - Develop authentic relationships with the families of the residents
 - Keep your brand in front of prospects on a regular basis
- Share your strategy with your entire team. Knowing that you are responding to their needs and the needs of the broader community will provide more impetus to remain on board.
- Carry out your program with consistency and perseverance. Resist the temptation to slide back into old habits.

You can’t just sit around and “wish” for better residents to make your nurses stay.

Of course, there is much more to all of this. SoftVu has, in fact, created an entire new platform around it called SeniorVu.

But, in order to move the needle on retention, the current precarious balance needs to be upset long enough to create a healthier mix of residents. Most would agree that you can’t just sit and wish for better residents so that your nurses stay. You have to get out there and find them!

As the SoftVu article points out, “Healthier residents mean senior living communities can lower overall community acuity, easing the physical and emotional burden on the nursing staff. This increases retention of talented employees and creates a desirable workplace, easing the recruiting process. Suddenly, the cycle is moving in the right direction.”

You can read the entire SoftVu article in their newsletter [here](#).



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