



Who Will Take The Initiative You Or The Regulators?

By Meg LaPorte

Workforce issues can be among the most vexing matters that nursing home operators must contend with, especially when it comes to recruitment and retention. Turnover rates for direct care staff remain high in this setting, and creating programs and policies aimed at keeping staff happy and supported are a main focus for many operators.

Adding to this complication is the fact that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) recently indicated that it will soon revise the staffing measures used to calculate the Five-Star ratings for nursing homes to include staff turnover and tenure via the Payroll-Base Journal data reporting requirements. This of course means that nursing home ratings will be affected.

So how will providers contend with yet another challenge to keeping up their star ratings? To state the obvious, ensuring staff are happy with their work, training them well, and recognizing them for a job well done are a good start.

It's All About Wireless

To that end, one of the biggest trends in this segment of health care is to implement wireless systems. This can cover a range of products, from smart wearables to automated sensor technology and anywhere in between. For many nursing home providers, technology that instantly connects staff and residents via a wireless system is helping to improve resident care.

What's more, a key aspect of a nursing home's operation is communication, and good communication is one way to ensure a happy team, says JJ Johnson, CEO of Cornell Communications, a Senior Housing Forum partner. Cornell provides nurse-call systems to the entire senior living continuum. The bread and butter of a good nursing home, assisted living community, or even an independent living community, is the ability for staff to connect with each other and with residents quickly and effectively, and technology in this area abounds.

'Beloved by Staff'

"When staff and residents are connected effectively and efficiently, team members are happier and they are more empowered to provide good care," says Johnson. He explains that Cornell's nurse-call system is designed to improve staff satisfaction via the following features:

- Logged documentation capabilities for recording the response times of your staff and ensuring residents' needs are met in a prompt manner;
- Real-time views of care delivery that make data-driven decisions easy, thereby improving resident care, while optimizing staff workflow; and
- Detailed documentation that demonstrates how efficient staff response system is.

Technology that improves resident care and empowers staff to do their jobs better is always a good thing, of course. "Our alarm and communications systems give residents peace of mind knowing they have 24/7 access to technology that can get them timely help in emergency situations," says Johnson. "Our wireless nurse-call system is beloved by staff in long-term and post-acute care settings because it's easy to use for residents, it's an efficient way to document care for staff, in addition to being user-friendly.

An App for That

Cornell's newest feature, called *inform*, is making it even easier for staff to remain connected and up to date. A mobile nurse call application, *inform* works with a community's existing nurse call system to improve staff response time, resident well-being, data management, and customer satisfaction, explains JJ. "It's the nurse call system for the 21st century because it seamlessly connects pull cord, wall mounted, and mobile call stations. All calls are presented in a single interface so staff can see what calls need to be answered. Plus, it lets staff respond to calls with a swipe," he says.

The *inform* system presents all calls from residents in a single interface so staff can see what calls need to be answered. The interface lets staff respond to calls with a swipe on their phone or other device.

"Many mobile nurse call systems use an invasive RTLS to track staff's every move," says Johnson, "but *inform* allows for self-reporting, an improvement over the 'Big Brother' RTLS's used by other facilities."

When it comes to CMS' Five-Star staffing measure, there are many options for facilities to consider when making decisions on must-have, everyday systems, be they in the areas of IT, administrative back office, clinical, or operational. But the foundation of effectively managing a nursing home today is getting communication right.

Cornell Communications offers state-of-the-art, reliable emergency call and communications solutions – including visual and wireless "nurse" call products, and clinical status, reporting, and paging systems. It has completed over 24,000 installations in skilled nursing facilities; independent, assisted living, and memory care communities; and medical outpatient centers or clinics in every state in America. It has the largest service network in the industry.



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