



The Key to Making Your Margins: Direct Care Staff

By Connie Haworth

As a management team, we often think we know what the needs of our residents are. The Director of Nursing knows the diagnosis and medications, the Dining Director sees the resident at meals, and the activity staff see the resident participate in activities. But if you want to know what is really going on with residents, just ask caregivers, housekeepers, or maintenance.

These direct care associates know our residents intimately. They see that the resident's use of adult briefs has increased, they are calling on their pendant more frequently, or they are throwing away more wine bottles than usual.

Mark Anderson with Eldermark suggests making sure direct care staff are your "Business Partners". According to Anderson, "At the end of the day, it really is the caregivers and their work in providing the care and documenting the care, that helps us get to where we want to go in achieving" financial goals. When direct care staff provide more services and fail to document or advise management that there is a change in the resident's needs, the cost of care increases without a corresponding increase in revenue.

Show and Tell

There can be many challenges in getting direct care staff to share this information, including pressure from the resident, pressure from the family, and their own caring attitude. Residents may ask the direct care staff not to tell anyone that they need more assistance because they fear they will be moved to a higher level of care. Families may pressure direct care staff not to tell because they are concerned about a higher cost of care. Direct care staff may not tell because they are caring individuals who think helping a little more won't hurt anyone.

It is important to address this challenge upfront with direct care staff. Helping them understand why having a clear picture of the resident's real needs and documenting all the care provided is the critical step. As Anderson shared, we want them to get credit for all their hard work.

Building a Business Partnership

Anderson also suggested sharing pertinent financial information with direct care staff. As an operator, he found himself in a situation where worker's compensation claims were very high and this was impacting the bottom line. He shared pertinent information about the cost of premiums and the worker's compensation experience rating with the direct care staff. They talked about what great things they could be doing with the money they were spending on premiums if the premiums weren't so high. He partnered with them to develop a plan to address the high experience rating, which included additional training, pre-employment flexibility screening, and purchasing more equipment. By partnering with the direct care staff, they were able to achieve their five-year goal of reducing premiums in only three years.

Currently, as Senior Vice President at Eldermark, Anderson continues his commitment to helping communities maximize their bottom line through operational review and analysis services, then partnering them with software products that help operators maximize their margins through point-of-care and marketing software tools.

Having a clear picture of the services being provided to residents is critical to the bottom line. To accomplish this, operators must make direct care staff their "Business Partners" in a way that is on-going and substantial.