

Addressing Staff Burnout in Senior Care Organizations

Question

What are some ways that senior care organizations can prevent burnout among staff members?

Answer

Staff members often experience stress, fatigue, anxiety, grief, and trauma when caring for senior care residents, which can lead to burnout. Research indicates that burnout has a negative relationship with safety and quality.¹

The following strategies may be valuable for senior care facility leadership and management to reduce the incidence of burnout in their facilities.

- Ensure appropriate staffing for your facility, and look critically at staffing ratios in comparison to the acuity of the resident population. Plan for contingency staffing during flu season.
- Enact systems-level change as needed. Involve staff members in organizational changes by listening to their concerns and giving them a voice.
- Optimize workflows for staff. There may be inefficient workflows and redundant processes affecting your staff members' ability to complete their jobs.
- Cultivate a safe environment for staff members. Provide appropriate and sufficient supplies and equipment, identify and address environmental hazards in the workplace, and ensure appropriate security precautions.
- Create backup procedures for critical or emotionally challenging situations.
- Conduct huddles daily, and provide opportunities for debriefing discussions before staff members leave the facility after their shifts end.

- Use meetings, bulletin boards, newsletters, and more to keep staff members continually updated and educated.
- Educate your staff members about burnout and compassion fatigue, and normalize discussions about these topics. Make resources available that feature guidance from industry experts and mental health professionals.
- Offer employee assistance programs to your staff as well as connections with local hospice care providers to assist with bereavement counseling.
- Make available mental health resources and support as well as chaplains and other spiritual advisors either in person or virtually.
- Include chaplains or other spiritual advisors in making connections between residents and their families instead of leaving this responsibility primarily in the hands of the nursing or activities staff.
- Offer professional development programs, and ensure your staff members are aware of the opportunities available to them.
- Provide mental health screening tools and hotlines, and develop wellness programs to support staff members. Consider devising a peer mentoring program or a self-care buddy system so staff members can support each other emotionally. Offer tips and strategies to help staff members practice self-care.
- Express appreciation to staff members and offer recognition either verbally or in written form. Personalized thank-you cards or posters showing staff members going “above and beyond” can go a long way.
- Listen carefully to staff members. Inquire about what they may need at the point of care and whether any obstacles exist that make it more difficult for them to comply with directives from management.
- Enforce regular staff breaks and time off, and support nonpunitive sick and paid leave policies.
- Specify quiet rooms in the facility for staff members to retreat to during high-stress shifts.
- Determine whether your organization can offer incentives to staff members, such as meals and snacks, gift cards, discounted childcare, and more.²

Endnotes

¹ Yellowlees, P., & Rea, M. (2022, September 27). *Patient safety primer: Burnout*. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. Retrieved from <https://psnet.ahrq.gov/primer/burnout>

² Institute for Healthcare Improvement. (2021, January 12). *Lessons from nursing home staff to address burnout and enhance joy in work*. Retrieved from www.ihl.org/insights/lessons-nursing-home-staff-address-burnout-and-enhance-joy-work; Institute for Healthcare Improvement. (2020, December 21). *Time-saving tips to help prevent nursing home staff burnout*. Retrieved from www.ihl.org/insights/time-saving-tips-help-prevent-nursing-home-staff-burnout

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