



## **FAST FACTS: Staff Retention**

Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes is a national campaign to improve the quality of care and life for the country's 1.5 million people receiving care in nursing homes. Nursing homes, their staff and consumers can join in this effort by working on the campaign goals, designed to improve quality. This consumer fact sheet explains why nursing home staff retention is a key factor in providing quality care to residents of nursing homes.

### **What does staff retention mean?**

Staff retention means that a nursing home's certified nursing assistants (CNAs), nurses and other staff members have worked in the nursing home long enough to learn each resident's needs and preferences. Experienced staff members know the nursing home's routines and practices.

Nursing homes measure both how many staff stop working at the home ("turnover") and how long staff have stayed ("retention") in the same or similar jobs. A nursing home with high turnover rates means that new caregivers are constantly being hired and trained.

By increasing staff retention, a nursing home can keep experienced, competent staff and that helps build strong bonds between residents and staff. Consistent caregiving is possible with a stable staff. Most residents are more comfortable with caregivers who know their personal preferences and caregiving needs.

### **How is staff retention improved?**

Staff retention is improved by increasing the number of consistent, well-trained and compassionate employees who stay at the nursing home. Of course, it is not possible for every staff member to stay at the same nursing home forever. People change jobs for many reasons—to go to college, retire or move. Some people do not have the skills or knowledge to work with residents of a nursing home. Nursing homes should not hold on to staff just to improve their retention rates.

### **What should you know about increasing staff retention?**

The challenges every nursing home faces in holding on to devoted, well-trained and compassionate caregivers are similar to the challenges faced by every business and employer:

- Pay and benefits must be sufficient to support a family.
- Staff should feel respected, valued and supported by their supervisor and the nursing home management.
- Initial and ongoing training must be relevant and build skills and knowledge.
- Workloads must be fair, balanced and predictable.

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### **How does retention benefit residents?**

- Residents don't have to explain to new caregivers how to care for them day after day.
- Staff can anticipate needs and respond more quickly, confidently and naturally, when they know the residents.
- Residents are more comfortable with the intimate aspects of care when they know their caregivers.
- Residents with dementia are much more comfortable with familiar caregivers.
- Residents' relationships with staff are strengthened.

### **How does retention benefit nursing home staff:**

- Caregivers know what residents want and need. They can give better care and be more organized in their work with team members they know.
- Caregivers are less likely to be working with "temporary" nurses or CNAs who are not as familiar with nursing home routines.

### **How does retention benefit nursing homes:**

- Increased staff retention reduces the time and costs of advertising, interviewing, hiring and training new staff. It costs about \$3,500 to replace each CNA.
- Increased staff retention means less spending to hire "temporary" workers.
- Satisfied staff members help recruit other good workers. There are nursing homes in the country that have waiting lists of CNAs who want to work there.
- Satisfied staff translates into better care and image in the community.

### **What questions should you ask about staff retention?**

- Ask residents if they have a CNA who has cared for them for a long period of time. If the resident can't answer, talk with a family member.
- Ask the management and nursing staff how long have you worked here?
- Ask the director of nursing or administrator about the home's turnover or staff retention rates and ask if they have plans for improving them.

### **How can you encourage staff retention?**

- If the nursing home does not have a staff retention plan, encourage the director of nursing and the nursing home administrator to start by focusing on one job category (such as nurses or CNAs).
- Family and resident councils can work with the home to create new and different staff recognition programs, secure more and better training opportunities for staff and conduct staff surveys.
- A guide on retaining staff, *Staff Stability*, is available to nursing homes on the Advancing Excellence Web site. The guide provides practical tools for immediate and long-term use to retain competent and compassionate caregivers.