

## Addressing Staff Burnout in Senior Care Facilities

### Question

Staff burnout seems to be at an all-time high at our senior care facility. What are some ways in which we can prevent this burnout and help our employees?

### Answer

Staff members often experience stress, fatigue, anxiety, grief, and trauma when caring for senior care residents. Research indicates that burnout has a consistent negative relationship with safety and quality.<sup>1</sup>

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 personal protective equipment (PPE) including face shields, face masks, gloves, and protective clothing.
- 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. Make available resources featuring 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.
- Provide professional development programs as well as screening tools and hotlines. Ensure your staff members are aware of the opportunities available to them.
- Provide wellness programs for staff.
- Devise a peer mentoring program or a self-care buddy system so staff members can check in with each other to provide emotional support and watch out for each other.
- 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.
- Teach staff members how to practice self-care.

- Normalize open discussions about compassion fatigue and burnout with staff members. Ensure that any materials or meetings establish how natural it is to struggle with mental health.
- Enforce regular staff breaks and time off.
- Specify quiet rooms in the facility for staff members to retreat to during high-stress shifts.
- Offer incentives to staff members, such as meals and snacks, gift cards, discounted childcare, and more.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ECRI. (2019, March 8). Burnout and its impact on patient safety.

<sup>2</sup> 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/communities/blogs/lessons-from-nursing-home-staff-to-address-burnout-and-joy-in-work](http://www.ihl.org/communities/blogs/lessons-from-nursing-home-staff-to-address-burnout-and-joy-in-work); Institute for Healthcare Improvement. (2020, December 21). *Time-saving tips to help prevent nursing home staff burnout*. Retrieved from [www.ihl.org/communities/blogs/time-saving-tips-to-help-prevent-nursing-home-staff-burnout](http://www.ihl.org/communities/blogs/time-saving-tips-to-help-prevent-nursing-home-staff-burnout)

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