

How to Implement a Peer Mentorship Program

Overview

The notion that new employees need to know organization expectations, facility specific information, receive support and feedback in order to be successful is hardly new or surprising. But in the old culture of the workforce new employees were often thrown into work situations with little support or resources. It was common for the new employee to be “on his own” on the second or third day of employment. When the new employee failed to show-up for work on the third day it was greeted with statements like, “I knew she couldn’t cut it.” And, “she was too slow, she needed too much help.” Often the new employee was set up for failure and then failed. Because frontline workers were seen as expendable and interchangeable their loss was of little concern to the organization.

But what are the real costs? In a purely financial sense that costs are great, recruiting and replacing new employees is expensive. Conservative cost estimates are \$2,700 to \$4,000 to replace a certified nursing assistant and \$8,000 to replace a registered nurse. Just do the math and see the most obvious costs to organizations.

But these costs are just the beginning for a long-term care community. The costs of turnover impact quality of life and quality of care. Elders living in nursing homes have stated they want to know the staff taking care of them, to like and trust them, and to believe the staff members reciprocate these feelings. They are identifying the need for relationships. The use of permanent or primary staff assignments is important in creating these relationships. But primary staff assignments will not work in a community with high or even moderate turnover of new staff. Creating successful new frontline staff is the most basic starting point to stabilize the workforce and to move to a new culture of care.

Peer Mentoring Programs have long been used as a mechanism to transition new employees from novices to successful, knowledgeable employees.

Program Goals and Objectives

1. To identify what new employees need to be successful
2. To determine what residents expect and require from new employees
3. To establish a comprehensive mentorship program based on the needs of new employees, the expectations of residents, and the goals of the organization
4. To define the roles and responsibilities of the mentor
5. To establish basic skills and competencies needed by the mentor for success
6. To establish the mentoring process
7. To measure outcomes of the mentoring process

Process Description

A Mentorship Program needs to consider these structures for success and ongoing development.

1. A Mentorship Program Coordinator
 - The Program Coordinator will be responsible for assigning new CNAs to mentors
 - Will have the primary responsibility for communicating with new CNAs and mentors throughout the mentorship period.
 - Will coordinate the evaluation and ongoing education for mentors
 - Will give formal evaluation of the new CNA, the Level 2 CNA mentor, and the mentorship process.

2. Each new CNA will be in the Mentorship Program

- The new CNA will be assigned a mentor on his/her first day of employment or before.
- The new CNA and mentor will meet on the first day of employment, or as soon as possible.
- The new CNA will have the same work schedule as the mentor for the initial mentorship period. This should be coordinated with the nursing department scheduler.
- The initial mentorship period is determined and committed to the following:
 - Newly certified CNAs will have a minimum of a 10-day clinical mentorship period.
 - Experienced CNAs will have a minimum of a 5-day clinical mentorship period.
 - Additional time will be considered for the mentorship period as needed by the individual.

Application Process for Mentors

1. Criteria for mentors
2. Application process
3. Selection process
4. Rewards and advancement for mentors
5. Evaluation

Evaluation of Mentorship Program

The Mentorship Program will be reviewed annually for its effectiveness and continued growth as a part of the organizations Quality Improvement/Assurance Program.

Challenges to Success

1. There are many challenges to the success of a peer-mentoring program. They center on several key issues.
2. Program logistics and administration
3. Organization commitment to the success, value, and ongoing development of new employees.
4. Nursing commitment and participation in empowering mentors and new employees.
5. Clarity on the role of mentors and commitment to their ongoing development and support.