

Change Ideas for On-the-Job Support for New Workers

Typical issues & evidence of discordance:

- Unresolved friction between newly hired nursing assistants and the residents they care for, their coworkers, or their supervisors.
- New nursing assistants who fail provide less than quality care due to difficulties in handling the pressure of the fast-paced environment and adjusting to residents' individual needs.
- A large percentage of nursing assistants quitting during their first three to six months on the job.
- Newly hired nursing assistants frequently coming to work late or calling out.

Barriers:

- Nurse supervisors frequently do not see nursing assistant supervision as part of their job description. Busy handling heavy workloads of their own and dealing with the fallout from problematic nursing assistant behaviors such as lateness and call-outs, they tend to devote little time to supervising nursing assistants except to intervene in a crisis.
- Nurse supervisors generally lack training or support in how to manage staff. The feedback they provide to the nursing assistants is often solely punitive, and the opportunity to help nursing assistants overcome challenges that may be keeping them from being reliable employees is lost.
- Experienced staff often ignores or undermine new staff rather than offering them support.

Goal:

- To give new workers the support and training they need to become confident when doing the job.
- To help new workers become attached to the organization and to the people they are caring for and working with.
- To offer assistance to workers who need help in overcoming barriers to maintaining employment.

Infrastructure helpful to support the change:

- A peer mentor program with trainings and job descriptions for peer mentors that allows them time to interact with and support mentees.
- Frequent in-service meetings for new employees with a focus on interpersonal communication, relationship-building and problem-solving skills
- Formal training for everyone charged with supervisory duties.
- Organization-wide adoption of a supportive supervisory approach
- A redesign of the jobs of supervisory staff to allow time for effective supervision, which includes relationship-building and positive reinforcement as well as correction
- An employee assistance program to help eligible workers access needed social and supportive services

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Measurement possibilities:

- Keep track of turnover and retention rates to see if retention has improved, especially during the first six months of employment.
- Poll residents cared for by new nursing assistants after their first three months on the job to see if the quality of care they receive and their relationships with nursing assistants improve under the new probationary procedures.
- Review evaluations by peer mentors and supervisors periodically to determine whether new nursing assistants appear to be learning what they need to know and getting the support they need.
- Track use of employee assistance program and its effectiveness in resolving employment barriers for workers.

PDSA Cycles:

PLAN: Determine what supports are needed for new workers, mentors, and supervisors and put them in place, redesigning workloads as necessary to allow time for new duties.

DO: Make sure new hires are in frequent contact with well-trained mentors and supervisors with clearly defined and complementary roles. Hold regular training sessions for new workers to help them develop their skills and to give them a chance to talk about challenges encountered on the job. Help those who need assistance in accessing supports and services from government or community agencies.

STUDY: Through formal and informal polling, explore whether new hires feel more attached to your organization and more confident on the job after three months in the new system than they did in after the same amount of time in the old one.

ACT: Adjust your program as necessary based on feedback from nursing assistants, residents, supervisors, and mentors.

Questions to consider:

- What should be the role of a supervisor? Of a peer mentor?
- What services for low-income workers can we provide or tap into in the local community to help workers overcome potential barriers to continued employment?
- What skills do new nursing assistants need to learn or have reinforced during their few weeks on the job?

Change Ideas:

- Hold biweekly or monthly in-service training sessions to help new employees learn or solidify skills. If possible, build in opportunities for attendees to discuss situations they are encountering on the job
- Pair each new employee with a peer mentor who can answer questions, help resolve troublesome situations, and serve as a sounding board. Ensure that mentors check in with mentees regularly during their first three months on the job
- Have supervisors check in with new employees at least once a week during their first 30 days on the job to monitor their progress and provide guidance or support as needed
- Appoint a staff case manager or arrange with a local human services agency to provide as-needed counseling to help new hires obtain emergency loans, affordable transportation and childcare, food stamps, and other assistance needed to overcome obstacles to maintaining employment.
- Help nursing assistants manage their limited finances by a) promoting the availability of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and letting staff know

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Change Ideas (cont'd)

where they can find free tax-preparation assistance in order to qualify, b) providing no-interest emergency loans to be repaid through weekly paycheck deductions, and c) providing financial literacy classes at no cost to teach such things as the benefits and drawbacks of using credit cards and the difference between types of financial accounts, such as checking, savings, certificate-of deposit, and 401(k). Nonprofit facilities may also be able to offer employees individual development accounts, a means of saving in which the individual deposits money in a bank account for the purpose of buying a home, paying educational or training expenses, starting a small business, or saving for retirement. The employer matches each dollar deposited by a set amount, usually between \$1 and \$3.

Resources:

See Change Ideas for Orientation for peer mentoring recommendations

Creating a Culture of Retention: A coaching approach to paraprofessional supervision. Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute. September 2001. Available free of charge at <http://www.directcareclearinghouse.org/download/Coaching.pdf> A curriculum for teaching coaching supervision is also available through <http://www.directcareclearinghouse.org>

For information on Individual Development Accounts, see <http://idanetwork.cfed.org/> or <http://www.idanetwork.org/>

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation offers a free educational tool, *Money Smart* that helps people understand basic banking. To order a hard copy or a CD-ROM, go to the FDIC website at <http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/order.html> or call (877) 275-3342. The curriculum is also available online in English and Spanish at <http://www.fdic.gov/consumers/consumer/moneysmart/mscbi/mscbi.html>

The IRS-operated VITA Program offers free tax assistance for individuals earning \$36,000 or below who cannot prepare tax returns on their own. To locate the nearest VITA site, call (800) 829-1040.

For information on the Earned Income Tax Credit, visit <http://www.irs.gov/eitc>

Finding and Keeping Direct-Care Staff. The Catholic Health Association of the United States and the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute, 2003. Available free of charge at <http://www.directcareclearinghouse.org/download/FindKeepBook.pdf>