

The ongoing staffing shortage in senior care facilities is not only a workforce issue, but also a patient safety and dignity issue. What began as a short-term result of COVID-19 has developed into a long-term crisis that affects the quality of care of older adults. As a future professional provider serving seniors, I believe the solution requires more than hiring more workers. Solving this issue requires hiring compassionate individuals who value the older population and use their resources to meet the physical and mental needs of their residents. Facility leadership plays an important role, as they must work diligently to retain the good employees. Throughout his career, John Vance represented values of service, mentorship, and compassion, and I do believe this approach reflects those same values.

When addressing staffing shortages, the first step is to improve how individuals are recruited into this delicate field. There is a stigma around working in senior care. It is thought that working in these facilities are physically exhausting, underappreciated, and emotionally taxing. Instead of having the goal to fill positions, the goal needs to be hiring people who want to work with this population. Building stronger relationships with high schools, career centers, community colleges, and certified nursing assistant training programs could make this process obtainable. Students frequently do not consider careers in aging services because they are not exposed to the rewarding side of the work. I do not want to discredit the work of senior healthcare workers, as it is a very emotionally taxing job. Older adults have lived long, complex lives, and building relationships with them then losing them when they pass can be incredibly difficult. This is why more people need to love the job. If students see the field as a meaningful environment, they may develop this love that I, and many others have.

However, finding staff is only one part of the solution. Keeping employees is just as important and is likely where many facilities struggle the most. Caregivers and other aids often leave

because they are overworked, underpaid, underappreciated, and mentally exhausted. When I am a pharmacist in a senior care setting, I am going to prioritize creating an environment where my colleagues feel respected and supported. I believe that small changes can make a major difference. Flexible scheduling, especially when your staff are students or people with families, can reduce burnout and added stress. Keeping myself accountable, upholding an open-door policy, and recognizing when my peers are working hard can improve overall morale. When a worker feels like they are supported and appreciated they are more likely to remain committed to their job, as well as provide better care to the residents.

Utilizing staffing resources effectively is important as well. Facilities that lack this often have the employees so focused on completing physical tasks like bathing, feeding, and medication dispensing that they have no time for emotional interaction. Residents are left experiencing loneliness, anxiety, and sadness. Another goal should be redistributing the staff appropriately. Caregivers could rotate responsibilities, or a specific staff member can be assigned to focus on social interaction each shift. Additionally, utilizing strength in numbers could be beneficial as well. Tasks can be completed more efficiently when employees work together. These extra few minutes of interaction can significantly improve a resident's day.

All in all, the staffing shortage in senior care is not only a workforce issue. When I am a provider, I would approach this challenge by focusing on compassion, respect, and support for staff and residents. Recruiting individuals who care about older adults, creating an environment where employees feel respected, and utilizing staffing resources to their full potential can improve the quality of care in these facilities. I strive to carry the values John Vance demonstrated throughout his life.