

12-29-25 Weekly Clinical Update

As we roll the calendar once again, New Year Resolutions come to mind. Many folks make them, but few follow them throughout the entire year. It's good to look at what worked in the past, and what needs to be changed in the future. Once again, for long-term care facilities, staffing is at the top of many lists of concerns for leadership, management, and even direct care partners. Long-term care facilities...all phases of long term care, face significant challenges in retaining staff, with turnover rates exceeding 50% annually due to demanding workloads, burnout, and competitive job markets. High turnover not only disrupts patient care but also increases recruitment costs and strains remaining employees. However, implementing targeted strategies can foster a positive work environment, boost job satisfaction, and improve retention. Drawing from long-term care professional insights let's outline some proven approaches to keep your team engaged and committed.

First of all, consider setting retention goals through your Facility Assessment process collaboratively with your QAPI teams. You may want to determine the total cost of agency and other contract services, then determine if it would be possible to offer that compensation amount to your own staff. Also, remember, not all turnover is bad, and some is unavoidable such as staff moving away from the area, or assisting some staff member to "pursue their future in an alternate setting". That being said, there are some specific strategic moves to improve retention rates.

- Offer competitive compensation and benefits. One of the most direct ways to retain staff is through fair pay and comprehensive benefits. Nursing facility employees often cite low wages as a primary reason for leaving. Provide salaries that match or exceed regional averages, along with bonuses for tenure, performance, or picking up extra shifts. For instance, some facilities have successfully used retention bonuses and triple pay for overtime to fill gaps without relying solely on temporary staff. Benefits may include health insurance, retirement plans, paid time off, free or low-cost meals at work, and even perks like childcare assistance or student loan repayment programs. Competitive packages signal that you value your employees' contributions and well-being.
- Foster a supportive and purpose-driven, person-centered culture. From experience, changing the "culture" of a nursing center is a very long, and challenging process, so develop patience and persistence...DON'T GIVE UP! A positive workplace culture is essential for long-term retention. Encourage a sense of purpose by involving staff in decision-making and highlighting how their work impacts residents' lives. Leadership should model empathy and support, with regular walkarounds and listening sessions to address concerns promptly. Build trust through open dialogue, where employees feel heard and respected. Recognize achievements publicly—simple gestures like "thank you" notes or shout-outs can significantly boost morale and loyalty. Ultimately, create an environment where staff feel valued, not just as workers, but as integral parts of a caring organization.
- Promote work-life balance with flexible scheduling. Staff empowerment is a very challenging process but is part of changing the culture of the organization. Burnout is rampant in nursing facilities due to long hours and mandatory overtime. To combat this, eliminate forced extra shifts and introduce flexible scheduling options, such as self-scheduling tools or part-time or PRN roles. Set limits on consecutive shifts and mandate time off to prevent exhaustion. Accommodate different shift preferences, including night shifts with adapted training and support. Consider flexible scheduling to enable staff to meet both professional and personal responsibilities. (Most employees put their families at a higher priority than a work schedule, so the facility must enable staff to meet both of

those responsibilities.) This flexibility helps employees balance personal lives, reducing turnover and improving job satisfaction. Turnover patterns show that employers that attempt to understand and accommodate personal needs are more successful in both recruiting and retaining good staff.

- Invest in professional development and career growth. Staff retention improves when employees see opportunities for advancement. Offer ongoing training, certifications, and tuition reimbursement for further education. Involve hands-on staff in care planning and provide pathways to leadership roles. Career development programs not only enhance skills but also demonstrate investment in their future, making them less likely to seek opportunities elsewhere.
- Strengthen onboarding and mentorship programs. New hires are particularly vulnerable to early departure if they feel unsupported. Implement robust orientation programs that include mentorship from experienced staff, helping newcomers integrate quickly and build confidence. Streamline onboarding with clear expectations, hands-on training, and access to necessary resources like equipment. Peer mentoring and regular check-ins can foster connections and reduce isolation, especially for those on non-traditional shifts.
- Prioritize employee wellness and mental health support. The emotional toll of nursing facility work can lead to high stress levels. Introduce wellness programs, including mental health resources, counseling, and stress management workshops. Ensure adequate staffing to prevent overload, and promote a culture that encourages self-care. Access to fitness programs, healthy meals, or even on-site relaxation areas can make a difference. Addressing mental health proactively helps retain staff by showing genuine care for their overall health.
- Encourage open communication and staff engagement. Regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys or town halls, allow staff to voice ideas and concerns. Act on this input to show that their opinions matter. Engage in quality improvement initiatives where staff contribute to better practices, enhancing their sense of ownership. Transparent communication from leadership builds trust and reduces uncertainty, key factors in retention.

In order to retain good employees, you have to recruit good employees. Here are some effective recruitment strategies to be considered.

- Build a strong employer brand by highlighting a positive culture, meaningful work and employee testimonials. A positive brand appeals to candidates seeking purpose-driven roles.
- Offer competitive compensation and incentives which has already been addressed in retention. Tap into the resources from the industry association to stay up-to-date on wage comparisons and analyses.
- Leverage digital and targeted marketing including social media, job boards, lists of recent graduates of training/education program, virtual job fairs, in-person job fairs. As valuable as on-line web-based position boards are, they may not meet all your needs.
- Partner with education institutions and training programs for programs for internships, on-the-job training and direct pipelines.
- Implement employee referral programs by encouraging current staff to refer candidates with incentives of bonuses, wage referral benefits or gift cards and make the bonus last as long as the referral employment last (this practice allows the current employee to have impact on good, long-standing employees).
- Reconnect with former employees and applicants by reaching out to “boomerang” employees or past applicants who may be open to returning or re-applying.
- Host job fairs and community events to directly connect with candidates. Showcase your facility, and your staff.

- Explore temporary and flexible staffing options by partnering with other organizations for “interim” staff challenging.
- Promote professional development and career advancement.

In conclusion, retaining nursing facility staff requires a multifaceted approach tailored to your facility's needs. By combining competitive rewards, supportive cultures, and growth opportunities, you can create a workplace where employees thrive. Start small—perhaps with improved onboarding or recognition programs—and measure results through retention metrics. With creativity and commitment, nursing facilities can overcome turnover challenges and deliver consistent, high-quality care.

Resources:

[Recruitment Partnerships | Provider Solutions & Development](#)

[HR Recruiting Tools Software - Review Leading Systems](#)

[Nurse Retention: Strategies & Practices to Reduce Turnover - Nightingale Foundation](#)

[Current Best Practices for Nursing Recruitment and Retention Policies | Bucketlist](#)

[Addressing the 2025 Nursing Shortage: Strategies for Recruitment and Retention](#)