In continuing care, the quality of care is almost entirely dependent on the employees that organizations hire. The demand for workers in this segment is high. Over the next decade, post-acute care jobs are expected to be among the top employment groups in the United States.¹

Finding and hiring employees who are satisfied with their work and maintaining high levels of satisfaction are essential for post-acute care organizations that want to deliver high-quality, patient/resident-centered care. Studies show that many continuing care employees are satisfied with their work, but there's still room for improvement:

- The 2011-2012 National Survey of Customer and Employee Satisfaction in Assisted Living Communities reported that between 66 percent and 72 percent of employees are satisfied with their employers and would recommend them as a place to work.²

- The 2011-2012 National Survey of Customer and Employee Satisfaction in Nursing Homes found that between 62 percent and 67 percent of employees are satisfied with their employers and would recommend them as a place to work.³

Employee satisfaction in this highly competitive market is crucial because a direct connection exists between employee satisfaction and satisfaction among long-term care patients and residents. In the continuing care environment, this important connection extends to family satisfaction, as well. Dissatisfied employees can lead to turnover, which means disruptions to patient/resident care and disgruntled families. In contrast, when staff members are happy in their jobs, it has a positive effect on the quality of care being delivered.
Use Hiring Practices to Identify Candidates Whose Beliefs Are Consistent with Your Organization’s Values

Experts in post-acute care have found that four talent management strategies contribute to hiring, developing, and retaining more satisfied employees in order to increase patient, resident, and family satisfaction.

Experience has shown that the most satisfied employees feel they fit well in the organization. The first step to finding those types of employees is using hiring processes that ensure candidates’ beliefs are consistent with the organization’s values.

Jim Kinsey, Consultation Services Specialist at Planetree, believes that long-term and continuing care organizations need to move away from simply finding candidates who can fulfill the tasks of the job. “We need to focus our interest during interviews on the values and mission of the organization,” Kinsey commented. “This is how we ensure that we find people who have the right fit.”

Steve Moran, Account Manager at Vigil Health Solutions and author of the Senior Housing Forum blog, agreed. “I visit a lot of long-term care organizations,” Moran said. “And the most important qualities that employees can have are genuine warmth and caring.”

An integral part of the hiring process is identifying important employee values and using those as evaluation criteria during interviews. This approach has worked well for many different types of continuing care organizations, ranging from long-term care communities to home health care agencies and hospice organizations.

Promote Employee Growth Through Strengths-based Coaching and Performance Management

Once candidates join a continuing care organization, coaching and performance management play an important role in employee satisfaction. Strengths-based coaching and supervision are great ways to energize and enable employees. With this approach, managers identify growth areas for each staff member and work with employees to set goals related to those areas. This type of collaboration between managers and staff focuses on what motivates employees and how work is delegated. The dialogue it creates makes employees more excited about their work.
Kinsey believes that discipline programs don’t work because people get stuck in a rule enforcement cycle where few conversations take place. Strengths-based coaching and supervision, on the other hand, help employees stay connected to their purpose. This view is shared by Hospice of the Valley. “If a person has a consistent positive attitude and heart, we can teach them,” Westby observed.

Performance management is another technique that can be used to improve employee satisfaction. Evaluations should reinforce how employees’ work supports the organizational vision. Heritage Community, for example, wants employees to exhibit both nursing and customer service skills. Johnson reiterated that they are looking for “one combined package” of skills. Therefore, they evaluate staff on factors related to nursing care and customer orientation.

Technology can help support a culture of performance management in continuing care organizations. Kinsey noted that employees want to be evaluated on time and they want supervisors to remember all the positive care they provided during the year.

“Technology, such as performance management software, can help meet those goals,” Kinsey said. “Technology can also be used to engage residents and families in the performance management process. For example, a long-term care organization might bring iPads to residents’ rooms and ask for feedback for employee evaluations.”

Measure Employee Satisfaction, Recognize Employee Achievements

An effective way to quantify whether employees are happy with their work is to measure satisfaction through a survey. At Heritage Community, for example, the goal is to have employee satisfaction scores in the top 10 percent of peer organizations. To help reach this objective, the organization asks its staff to complete an annual employee satisfaction survey. Once results are compiled, the management team meets with each department and identifies three areas where improvements are needed. Formal action plans are developed, and departments provide quarterly updates on their progress.

Each February, the long-term care community highlights staff accomplishments from the past year. “It’s important,” Johnson said, “to ask for employee feedback, listen to the input, make improvements, and then communicate about the changes. If employees see progress in the workplace, they are more likely to be satisfied in their positions. This year, we saw a dramatic increase in employee satisfaction.”

Recognizing employee achievements is another way to improve staff satisfaction. Hospice of the Valley hosts an annual employee appreciation lunch for nearly 1,000 employees. This event energizes staff members and gives them an opportunity to reconnect with others. Heritage Community organizes a multi-day employee appreciation program held the week before Thanksgiving.

In addition to these annual celebrations, many long-term and continuing care organizations participate in frequent acknowledgment of outstanding employee work. As part of the “Wow!” program, Heritage Community employees and supervisors are encouraged to write notes to recognize outstanding customer service. Those accolades are converted to “Wow! Bucks” gift cards.

Background on Effective Hiring Techniques

- **Behavioral assessment software.** This solution provides candidates with a brief online assessment that focuses on important competencies, such as work ethic, customer focus, and compassion. Assessment results identify which candidates will be most compatible with the organization and job.

- **Behavioral interviewing.** In behavioral interviews, candidates are asked to provide examples of past job-related situations and how they reacted. This type of interview is a more accurate predictor of an applicant’s potential for success than traditional interviews.

- **Applicant tracking systems.** Applicant tracking systems allow candidates to complete job applications online. Human resources staff can quickly identify the best applicants and then automatically route their information to hiring managers for review.
Develop a Culture That Supports Connections Between Your Staff and Residents

Many of the best continuing care employees believe their work is more than just a job — it’s a calling. Organizational cultures that focus on care delivery and employee satisfaction help people stay connected to their purpose. Kinsey believes long-term and continuing care organizations need to be proactive and build a culture that focuses on both employees and patient-centered care delivery. The organizational infrastructure must enable employees to spend as much time on culture-related activities as they do on things like administrative meetings.

Moran has seen vision casting — a process by which organizations design and communicate their culture and vision — work well at long-term and continuing care organizations. This process then influences the types of candidates who are hired. When long-term and continuing care organizations hire the right people, it can change the culture and has a positive effect on residents and patients. “We need to remind long-term care employees on a daily basis that their work is important,” Moran said.

Hospice of the Valley employees, for example, get personal and job satisfaction by making connections with patients who need compassionate care. “We’ve tried to maintain a culture consistent with a small organization, even though we have grown over time,” Westby commented. “Our employees know they are part of a supportive team, and this makes them willing to accept responsibility and up their game.” Heritage Community has had a similar experience. Engagement with residents has increased staff satisfaction because employees feel like they are making a difference in people’s lives.

Spotlight on Home Health

The Visiting Nurse Association (VNA) of Boston and Affiliates is one of the oldest organized visiting nurse associations in the United States and one of the largest home health agencies in New England, serving 12,500 patients a year. With more than 500 employees, VNA of Boston understands that employee satisfaction plays a central role in delivering high-quality home health services.

VNA of Boston actively searches for candidates who share the home health agency’s values. Visiting nurses interact exclusively with patients and their families. This is a very different type of patient engagement than healthcare professionals experience in a traditional hospital setting.

The organization uses applicant tracking software to route individuals who meet those criteria to the HR team, and a behavioral interview process to identify candidates who have good communication skills and high levels of compassion. Candidates are invited to participate in a panel interview where the team asks about how the candidate would respond in different situations. “In a behavioral interview,” said HR Generalist Debbie Brown, “we observe how candidates tell the story of a particular event and discuss their reactions and the outcome.”

To confirm that employees enjoy customer interactions, VNA of Boston asks candidates to go on joint visits with a skilled nurse and to job shadow the nurse for at least a half-day. This gives the organization visibility into how the candidate engages with patients, and it also provides the candidate with insight into the day-to-day duties of the job.
Conclusion: Focus on Employees to Improve Resident and Patient Care

Continuing care organizations recognize that employees play a central role in delivering high-quality care. Patient-and resident-centered organizations have clearly defined core values and embed those beliefs into every aspect of their operations, including hiring, managing, and retaining staff members. Healthcare employees who fit well in a continuing care organization and are satisfied with their work are more likely to provide quality care.

To find and retain the best people, continuing care organizations must use hiring and interviewing techniques that ensure alignment between candidates’ beliefs and the organization’s values. Strengths-based coaching and consistent employee evaluations contribute to employee satisfaction. Talent management technology can support these activities and help build a strong and consistent culture of performance management and employee recognition. It’s also important to measure employee satisfaction over time. By following best practices like these, continuing care organizations will strengthen their work cultures and support connections between the staff and those they care for.


Create a culture of employee accountability within your post-acute healthcare organization.

Improving Employee Accountability Through Performance Management Initiatives
About HealthcareSource

With over 2,000 healthcare facilities as clients, HealthcareSource is the leading provider of talent management software for the healthcare industry. Through its cloud-based solutions, HealthcareSource helps healthcare organizations source, hire, assess, develop and retain the best workforce possible in order to reduce costs and to improve patient satisfaction and safety. The company’s talent management software solutions include applicant tracking, learning management, performance management, behavioral assessments, reference checking, physician recruiting, and candidate sourcing. A private corporation, HealthcareSource focuses exclusively on the healthcare industry and consistently earns high marks for client satisfaction and retention. HealthcareSource was named 2012 category leader for Talent Management by KLAS Research, 2012 Healthcare Informatics Top 100 and 2012 Deloitte Technology Fast 500.

1.800.869.5200 | solutions@healthcaresource.com | www.healthcaresource.com

Contact HealthcareSource to learn more about our solutions.
For more information, contact us at:
1.800.869.5200 or solutions@healthcaresource.com