

Improving the Situation of Nursing Assistants in Nursing Homes: A Practical Toolkit for Facilities Working to Improve Nursing Assistant Retention and Job Quality

Jennifer Craft Morgan, Sara Haviland, Thomas R. Konrad

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1) Identifying Barriers and Facilitating Factors in the Implementation of WIN A STEP UP

Turnover of direct care workers (DCWs) is a major problem in long-term care. This discontinuity in staffing is likely to have an impact on turnover costs, quality of care, staffing patterns, morale and organizational climates. Currently, the WIN A STEP UP program is aimed at improving the situation of nursing assistants in skilled nursing facilities in North Carolina. Using data collected from currently working nursing assistants, nurses who supervise nursing assistants and management informants of nursing homes currently participating and potentially participating in the WIN A STEP UP program, we have examined factors that are barriers or facilitators to the success of the WIN A STEP UP program in individual nursing homes. This document summarizes our preliminary findings. The full report, which will include these findings and an overall evaluation of the WIN A STEP UP program, will be available December 2005 at the conclusion of the grant period.

Major barriers to the implementation of the WIN A STEP UP program included:

- *Time constraints experienced by nursing home staff*
From child care responsibilities to pulling nursing assistants from floors, competing priorities at both the nurse and nursing assistant level make it difficult to schedule and complete additional training.
- *Overextension of the Staff Development Coordinator*
Staff development is often not the only job of the staff development coordinator (SDC) (if there even is one) in nursing homes. This position is often seen as the 'fill-in' position for the floor and for assisting the Director of Nursing. The SDC's ability to work on retention activities, including education/training like WIN A STEP UP, is hampered by this lack of protected time dedicated to staff development.
- *Management turnover*
Turnover at the level of management is often a major setback to the successful completion of the WIN A STEP UP program. Management commitment to the WIN A STEP UP program is essential to completion as prioritizing and committing staff time and nursing assistant time is necessary in order to complete the program. Turnover often stops the programmatic clock until/unless commitment can be reestablished.
- *Problems with the WIN A STEP UP payment system*
The lag created by using the university payment system for WIN A STEP UP is notable. The time between when the staff verifies module completion and when checks are sent

out is approximately six weeks. This is difficult for vulnerable populations like nursing assistants who begin to count on money that is owed to them from the program and are used to biweekly payment cycles. This delay is only exacerbated by delays in paperwork from trainers in nursing homes, WIN A STEP UP staff workload and business office issues (like holiday schedules).

Factors that facilitate the success of the WIN A STEP UP program include:

- *Stipends/bonuses for program participants*
The use of payments for both the continuing education and for retention have obvious appeal to nursing assistants but also serve to facilitate the completion of the program in a few ways. First, it helps recruit nursing assistants into the program and gives them a way to justify additional education at the expense of other jobs or family activities. Second, it relays the message that the nursing assistants are worth investing in (outsiders recognize that their work is important and that management has chosen to invest in them). Finally, it ensures that the program remains a priority in the organization. As there is a third party involved (WIN A STEP UP staff) and there is money at stake, the commitment to finish the program is enhanced – it is not just an extra in-service that can be rescheduled.
- *The quality and format of WIN A STEP UP teaching material*
The emphasis of the teaching material on interpersonal skills as well as clinical skills is well-received and enables staff trainers to engage the nursing assistants in both areas. The material is presented in a way (with the manual and overheads included) that is accessible to instructors and allows for shorter instructor preparation time.
- *The use of on-site instructors*
Using on-site trainers allows the WIN A STEP UP program to go beyond the classroom. Onsite educators have the opportunity for teaching moments on the floor and can build relationships with participants which facilitates communication between management and nursing assistants and empowers nursing assistants with an advocate (the onsite educator).
- *The presence of WIN A STEP UP and nursing assistant advocates within the upper levels of nursing home organization*
This is directly related to the barrier of management turnover. Without management buy-in, the WIN A STEP UP program can not succeed. Prioritizing staff time to the program and committing to invest in the retained nursing assistant workforce is essential to its completion.
- *The enthusiasm of nursing assistant advocates*
The WIN A STEP UP program relies on many advocates. From the support of the NC DHHS Office of Long Term Care and the North Carolina Health Care Facility Association to WIN A STEP UP champions (Administrators, DONs, SDCs and participants), WIN A STEP UP needs to harness the enthusiasm of all these nursing assistant advocates in order to overcome the real barriers to career development and workforce improvement for nursing assistants in North Carolina.

It is our aim to use this information to improve the WIN A STEP UP program after this and other systematic evaluation research is completed. In processing this information, we have already made improvements to several elements of the WIN A STEP UP program such as our payment system, the consistency of our follow-up contacts, and providing nursing staff training on the coaching model of supervision. We look forward to hearing your feedback on the above and hope that this information may suggest ways in which you can improve retention activities at your facility. Some of our suggestions from the preliminary data may be to prioritize some (or all) of the staff development coordinators time to nursing assistant education/training and retention activities and protect that time from competing priorities. The next part of this document outlines some retention/workforce improvement activities that may be of use to you. We offer this information for you to evaluate. Many of these programs have not yet been systematically evaluated but have some early indications that they may be successful in improving retention, job satisfaction, working conditions, career commitment and maybe even quality of care in nursing homes.

2) Outlining a ‘Toolkit’ of Potential Retention/Workforce Improvement Activities

In the last five years, a great deal of research and practice has developed in the area of workforce improvement for nursing assistants in nursing homes. Below is a short outline of some of the resources available including two books and a DVD that have been included in this packet for your use.

[Information on the Direct Care Workforce](#)

The [National Clearinghouse on the Direct Care Workforce](#) is a web-based repository for information on direct care workers nationally. In addition to the Practice Profile Database (indexed below), there is a comprehensive library, a section devoted to voices from the frontline, an outline of state activities and more. We encourage you to sign-up for their free bi-weekly newsletter.

<http://www.directcareclearinghouse.org/index.jsp>

[Practice Profile Database](#)

The [National Clearinghouse on the Direct Care Workforce](#) has a practice profile database that offers descriptions of programs and links to additional information. This database was compiled by the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute (PHI) and the Institute for the Future of Aging Services (IFAS). All programs have shown some evidence of success and you can review the selection criteria of the programs. It is great resource for nursing home administrators and nursing personnel for developing and engaging in retention/workforce improvement activities.

<http://www.directcareclearinghouse.org/practices/index.jsp>

[Solving the Frontline Crisis in Long-Term Care and the Nursing Assistant’s Survival Guide](#)

Dr. Karl Pillemer, the author of these two guides, has a long-standing interest in retention activities. Information in these two books (included) may provide you with ideas you can use to help you develop your own retention activities.

Stand Up and Tell Them

Stand Up and Tell Them features direct care workers talking about how their jobs as home health and nursing home aides are viewed by their families and their community. They discuss issues of discrimination and disrespect from clients, families, and supervisors, but also look to how these problems might be improved. This video was produced by the Better Jobs Better Care program, funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Atlantic Philanthropies and managed by the Institute for the Future of Aging Services, and documentary filmmaker David L. Brown. This may serve to inform a discussion at a staff meeting or in-service.

3) Provision of Tailored Suggestions Based on Data from Your Nursing Assistants

Organizational Reports for Facility Administrators

Included in this packet, you will find a report tailored to your facility. The last page of this report provides some general suggestions for areas in which you might consider improvement.