

Leadership & Mentoring

Introduction

According to the current Australian Bureau of Statistics information in 2015 one in every six people were 65 years or older (3.5 million people). Currently there are approximately 270,000 older persons that live in residential aged care accommodation and the demand for aged care service provision is ever increasing.

The recruitment and retention of a skilled and sustainable workforce to assist with caring for Australia's ageing population has been the topic of research and discussion for decades and to date there has been no real solutions developed for this widespread problem.

There are some real challenges for aged care workers and providers in today's aged care services environment. It is anticipated that these issues will continue until the regulatory bodies and aged care providers ensure that staff are valued, paid appropriately, and are seen as an asset and not an expense, but provide a unique and professional service to our older, vulnerable people.

Some of the issues for aged care nurses include, but are not limited to:

- A deficiency in education programs for staff or lack of incentives for staff to undertake further education.
- Lack of mentoring and leadership programs for new staff or skills & training programs for Registered Nurses and Managers.
- Reluctance to support and have staff ratios and skills mixing in place for safe, quality care delivery.

The issues for provider include, but are not limited to:

- The capability to comply with the stricter regulatory requirements to guarantee they deliver a high-quality service to meet consumer needs in a timely manner.
- To create a positive workplace culture and be a 'provider of choice for employees' to entice staff to come and work for the organisation.

Continuing Education Support

According to research conducted by Xiao (2020) "our study also shows that employer-sponsored education enables staff to develop their careers and contribute to retention rates." Staff expect paid education to develop their leadership and teamwork skills. Strong leadership in the aged care workforce has been found to contribute to staff intention to remain. Continuing education and mentorship for managers and registered nurses to develop knowledge about staff issues and effective leadership will help reduce staff turnover." This provides clear evidence that in-house education programs and support are one of the key strategies to develop towards the inducement of new and retention of current staff.

Leadership

“True leaders always practice the three ‘R’s’: Respect for self, Respect for others and Responsibility for all their actions” Anonymous. Nursing is an energetic and demanding profession requiring role models and leaders who are motivated to inspire others and is especially true in the aged care sector. In today's ever changing and demanding aged care settings, one of the keys to leading a dynamic effective team and driving culture change is by recognising and encouraging potential and current nurse leaders and senior RNs.

According to (Dwyer 2016) until they are provided with provider led leadership education programs nurses will continue to feel undervalued if there is no support for their roles and have good clinical leadership skills training is needed for nurses to transition through practice into specialised roles such as the RN team leader, Care Manager and Aged Care Nurse Practitioner (GNP). Providing a career structure and choice in the industry for the nurse to become a clinical leader or a manager of health services will improve recruitment and retention.

Mentoring

The term mentoring is defined as supporting and encouraging another person to manage their own learning in order that they may expand their potential, develop their skills, improve their performance, and become the professional they wish to be.

Nurses at all levels of experience often require support and guidance when undertaking a new or different role. This may be done on formal or an informal basis, depending upon the requirements of the mentor and the mentee.

Mentoring programs are proven to be an invaluable activity that usually enhances the participants skills, knowledge and confidence in their professional ability.

Mentoring principles also depend upon the elements of a supportive management, flexibility in schedules, incentives to be involved in a mentoring program, and recognition. These aspects all reinforce the importance of mentoring in the context of staff stability and performance.

Based on the latest nursing research, from the perspective of organisational culture and leadership, mentoring is a long-term commitment and solution rather than a short-term undertaking will lead to improved staff retention, satisfaction, and, ultimately, positive consumer outcomes.

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