



ENHANCING YOUR HEALTHCARE STAFFING SHORTAGE: STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS TO ATTRACT & RETAIN NEW HEALTH CARE GRADUATES

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The shortage of nursing and rehab staff is staggering and continues to grow throughout the Skilled Nursing Community. This employment deficiency will likely be in the healthcare industry for quite some time, even when pandemic is no longer prevalent. Over the past couple of years, employees have experienced burnout due to increased workloads, staffing shortages, and the emotional burden of caring for residents facing significant isolation, illness, and death. Some employees have left their jobs due to a lack of organizational infrastructures, absence of communication and not being part of a unified team. Other employees have been furloughed or permanently laid off as census declined during the height of COVID surges. There are those employees that left the healthcare industry because of compliance with vaccine mandates, and others have chosen to retire or to seek alternate employment, or a change in profession they perceive safer in a COVID world.

Many organizations are desperately looking to hire back health care professionals. Aside from the employment deterrents listed above, salary continues to be a significant factor in gaining and retaining employees. According to AHCA, “half of all nursing homes in the U.S. are so short-staffed; they are not accepting new patients. This can create major implications for the rest of the health care system. If a patient is unable to transition from a hospital to a bed in a nursing home for recovery, that person has to stay in a hospital longer, especially during a time when emergency rooms are being taxed to capacity.” Studies further indicate that it is difficult to attract career professional-level employees

knowing they may be regularly required to perform other responsibilities due to chronic shortages.

During these challenging times in staffing many recruitment models are turning to new graduates to fill critical open roles at the patient care level. The influx hiring of new graduates may lead to something referred to as the “experience-complexity gap.” This model relies on inexperienced labor during a time when care delivery is even more complex, specifically with a Skilled Nursing Facility (SNF).

It is important to understand new graduates enter the employment market with a different collection of skills due to the impact of COVID-19 on their student learning experiences. We know that in-person learning, especially in the laboratory, provides the student with multiple opportunities, invaluable social interaction, including qualitative feedback from instructors. Currently, educational experiences may occur through simulation, virtual clinical laboratories, and mobile technology. Virtual learning leads to decreased student motivation, possible missed guidance with instructor feedback, and peer collaboration. New graduates hired are likely to be less experienced compared to graduates that have been hired pre-pandemic. Now is not the time to feel overwhelmed, but to embrace these challenges as an opportunity to recognize and address the experience-complexity gap. A comprehensive shift from past retention models to innovative retention programs will support new graduates hired.

Preferred Therapy Solutions has embraced and designed a proactive hiring approach with new graduates and the onboarding procedures by incorporating enhanced education and communication forums. This model affords SNFs to be even more in tune with facility culture and with the temperament of their staff. When a facility is working with a reduced staff and staff representative of experience-complexity SNFs are more likely to experience: reduced clinical care, reduced patient satisfaction, and outcomes increased clinical errors and increased onboarding cost as they may resign after only a short time due to feeling inadequate.

This program encompasses mentorship and continual learning forums. Leadership models are implemented into learning forums providing information-driven brand and culture value, which assist in bridging the experience-complexity gap. New hires understand their respective role and have noted they feel aligned with the company’s brand from onboarding, to patient care, and safety.

Whether it is a new graduate nurse or rehab clinician, these strategies actively acknowledge current employees and show new hires the philosophy for a healthy culture:

1. Aligning new graduates with a mentor to support their clinical growth is invaluable. It reduces the burden on senior leadership in the department and fosters relationships amongst the team.
2. Teaching new graduates how to be an effective mentees is important in the successful mentor-mentee relationship. New graduates need to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, especially in the COVID world. A good mentor can guide new graduates in setting and achieving realistic goals. Mentors offer a personal connection in assisting with the educational resources provided and mentoring new graduates to seek the available material that will help them be successful in their new roles.
3. Ensure the new graduate has a thorough understanding of working in a SNF environment and their workplace expectations. SNFs are much more acute, fast-paced, and reliant on solid clinical assessments and documentation for reimbursement.
4. New graduates must understand the needs of their patient population. Will they be working with medically complex patients or long-term care patients with dementia or behavioral issues?

5. Effective communication skills are essential and for many new graduates, this is something they may have not yet fully mastered. New graduates must understand the interdisciplinary communication structure, they need to be comfortable with asking for help, know whom they have available to them for support, and be open to feedback.



6. Time management skills are challenging for new graduates. They are learning new processes and for many, this may be the first time they are required to perform certain tasks. However, there is always a level of productivity tied with any job and the sooner new graduates can grasp what is expected in a specific timeframe, the better their work/life balance will be.
7. Encouraging new graduates to identify their “why”. Why did they go into this profession? Why did they select this particular job? What motivates them each day?
8. Recognition and validation are important for everyone. Provide positive feedback and encouragement throughout the mentorship process. Help new graduates look for opportunities in every obstacle and permit them to adjust to this new environment.

As SNFs begin to hire new graduates, it is important to stand aligned with the new graduate strategy in retaining the new hire. This recruitment model will aid in a positive work-life balance and can make a demanding job much more attractive and reduce employee burnout while caring for our most vulnerable population. To learn more about the Preferred Therapy Solutions New Graduate Program please contact Jim MacManus, Director of Business Development at: (E) jmacmanus@preftherapy.com (P) 860-549-2732.

ABOUT PREFERRED THERAPY SOLUTIONS

Preferred Therapy Solutions is a full-service rehabilitation management organization dedicated to providing state-of-the-art clinical, management, billing, and information technology solutions to the post-acute and long-term care industry. Preferred Therapy Solutions is able to assist in developing a strategic road map designed to increase SNFs market share by identifying potential referral targets and providing useful information on competitor’s performance. Preferred Therapy Solutions abilities significantly enhance the quality, productivity, scope, and efficiency of any facility’s rehabilitation department while maintaining a focus on achieving high levels of patient satisfaction and providing excellent customer service.