

## Grant Outcome Report

### Research to Practice: Long-Term Care Charge Nurse Peer Mentoring

#### The Problem

There are a variety of issues facing long-term care nursing facilities. First, there is a severe shortage of long-term care registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs) in New York State.

According to a 2006 report by LeadingAge New York (formerly known as the New York Association of Homes and Services for the Aging), about 65% of New York nursing homes reported having unfilled RN and LPN positions. Staff turnover in nursing homes is also very common and increases recruiting and training costs for the organization. The United Nurses of America reported that it conservatively costs \$10,000 in direct costs each time an RN position turns over.

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In addition, nursing programs rarely train students in management. Yet when RNs or LPNs start working in long-term care settings, they are thrust into management and leadership positions as charge nurses. Without adequate training and preparation they often find it difficult to succeed in these roles, leading to high turnover rates and threats to quality of care. In September 2007, the New York State Health Foundation (NYSHealth) awarded the Foundation for Long Term Care (FLTC) a grant to expand across New York State the Pathways to Leadership program, a leadership, management, and communication training program aimed at reducing turnover of charge nurses.<sup>1</sup>

#### Grant Activities and Outcomes

The Pathways to Leadership program and training curriculum were developed under a prior grant from the New York State Department of Health. Results indicate that it increased nurse retention by 16% at the 14 nursing homes in which it was implemented.

<sup>1</sup> Pathways to Leadership was originally called Peer Mentoring for Long Term Care Charge Nurses.

#### KEY INFORMATION:

**GRANTEE**

Foundation for Long Term Care

**GRANT TITLE**

Research to Practice: Long-Term Care Charge Nurse Peer Mentoring

**DATES**

January 1, 2008–May 17, 2010

**GRANT AMOUNT**

\$154,000

**FUNDING**

2007 Special Opportunities Grant

The Pathways to Leadership program includes:

- A half-day session for administrators. Topics include the rationale and benefits of a leadership program for charge nurses, options for implementing it, and best practices.
- A two-day train-the-trainer session for nurses to deliver the program to others at their facility. Topics include teaching management, leadership, and communication skills in nursing home settings; practice; and confidence-building.

FLTC's goals were to conduct nine regional trainings across the State; train three administrators, as well as other nursing staff from 180 nursing homes; and prepare a cadre of 100 people to train other staff members in their or other nursing homes in New York. The project also included an outcome evaluation component to examine whether the training improved retention of new charge nurses, whether new charge nurses reported improved skills, and whether participation in the program improved quality of care.

A total of 165 nursing home administrators representing approximately 120 nursing homes attended the half-day session for administrators. Some 116 nursing homes sent 194 employees to the two-day train-the-trainer session, which exceeded FLTC's training goals. FLTC also offered a one-day refresher training to nurses toward the end of the grant period.

While there were promising results from the trainings, the project was not able to measure all of its outcome goals due to a low response rate from post-training surveys and the collection of outcomes data from the nursing homes. In response, FLTC organized three focus groups, with a total of 31 nurses who participated in the training, to gain a better understanding of the project's outcomes and impact. Here are the results from the survey and the focus groups:

### **Implementation of Pathways to Leadership in nursing after homes:**

FLTC found that only 18 of the participating nursing homes used the curriculum at their facility. Most nursing homes indicated that the financial crisis beginning in 2008 severely limited their ability to release staff members for training sessions or pay staff members to cover for nurses who attended trainings. Many nursing staff also focused more on managing their daily responsibilities instead of receiving additional training and education.

## Retention rates of nurses after training:

Project staff measured retention rates at three, six, and nine months before the training and again at the same intervals after the training.<sup>2</sup> These measures indicated that the average retention rate was higher after training compared with prior levels, though it was not statistically significant due to a small sample size.

## Improvements in nursing skill set:

Nurses at six of the 18 nursing homes that implemented the curriculum responded to a follow-up survey about their skills. Approximately 52 of 58 survey respondents said the program improved the way they managed their work in their unit, particularly in communicating with staff members, teamwork, problem-solving, and organizing/delegating work to others. Focus group respondents also indicated that the training increased their confidence as well as improved their leadership skills and ability to communicate effectively.

## Quality of care provided:

Participants were less clear about the impact of the training on the quality of care they delivered. They offered suggestions for improving future trainings, including training other staff members, such as aides and administrators, and offering refresher courses.

In response to the grant activities and outcomes, FLTC has made the following recommendations to promote successful implementation and efficient grant management of a charge nurse peer-mentoring program:

- Use a systems approach with a top-down emphasis that first teaches administrative staff, such as top managers, thereby increasing buy-in, followed by charge nurses, and finally nursing home aides to increase training among current and incoming staff members.



<sup>2</sup> Retention rates were determined by how many nurses quit or were terminated for certain time periods before and after the training. A comparison was then done with the average amount of nurses that were not retained before the training and those that were not retained after the training.

- Develop a combination of online and in-person course components to make it easier to implement the training curriculum and to reduce the number of off-site hours required, thus addressing some of the economic constraints faced by numerous organizations.
- Focus on the development of communication skills in the training curriculum, as these skills were identified as the most valued by nurses who participated in this project.
- Encourage the use of booster training sessions to foster the sustainability of the program's outcomes.
- Consolidate trainings in some of the regions and provide incentives to nursing homes that complete the program, thereby enabling them to continue offering the training and collecting outcomes data.
- Ask or consider requiring facilities to sign a contract obligating them to implement the training curriculum and adhere to the curriculum elements.

## The Future

At the close of the grant, it is unclear how many nursing homes have sustained the training program. However, there are anecdotal updates about the use of the training materials and the desire for new staff members to be trained. Part of FLTC's mission is to train staff members working in long-term care settings, and staff members plan to continue the efforts started under this grant.

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

### ABOUT THE GRANTEE

The Foundation for Long Term Care is a research and education organization founded in 1978. Its mission is to improve the way care for the aging and chronically ill is delivered through research and education. It is affiliated with, but legally separate from, LeadingAge New York (formerly known as the New York Association of Homes and Services for the Aging), a trade association of nonprofit eldercare providers across New York State.

The Foundation for Long Term Care programs have included certified nurse aide peer mentoring; charge nurse peer mentoring; cultural competence in long-term care; family/staff communication at the end of life; and person-centered care initiatives such as Bathing Without a Battle and Exceptional Care Planning. It has received four national awards for its research and education programs in long-term care.

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