

## Staffing Strategy Is Win-Win For Providers

**Creating full-time positions by combining part-time jobs across departments helps fill vacancies and promotes staff retention.**

B R I A N H U N T O O N

Long term care providers throughout the United States face the daily challenge of attracting and retaining qualified staff. This is especially true of line positions in non-nursing departments such as housekeeping, laundry, and dietary services. Providers find themselves competing with fast-food restaurants and retail outlets for the same pool of workers and struggling for ways to make positions in long term care more attractive to potential hires.

It is particularly difficult for providers to attract and retain qualified employees for part-time positions—especially for the 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. evening meal shift and evening floor care. According to many providers, these short shifts do not appeal to prospective employees because of the lack of hours and benefits, so these positions often go unfilled or experience high turnover. Faced with vacant positions, many administrators are forced to pay the high costs of agency staff or overtime for existing employees.

### A Practical Solution

One way providers can attract staff is to create a full-time position out of two or more part-time jobs for a single employee who is trained to work in more than one department.

For example, Genesis Hospitality Services, a provider of contract dietary and environmental services for skilled nursing and assisted living facilities, recently created a universal aide position to assist its customers in staffing part-time housekeeping, laundry, and dietary vacancies. It is a full-time position, with four hours served in the dietary department and four hours served in the housekeeping department on each shift. It is most often used

to fill the evening meal and floor-care vacancies.

Generally, a universal aide position within a nursing facility or assisted living center does not require any new policies or procedures and does not present potential violations of Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations.

To get maximum benefit, a provider must furnish training in all the departments where the aide will work. The

provider must also develop a comprehensive workflow description that incorporates all of the universal aide's duties.

### The Benefits

Teaming departments to create universal aide positions can significantly improve a facility's operational efficiency and bottom line. Fully-staffed housekeeping, laundry, and dietary services means that providers no longer have to pay the high costs of agency staff. In addition, they can eliminate the overtime pay previously given to existing employees who cover the consistently vacant shifts.

Creation of a universal aide position can also have a positive impact on staff recruitment and retention. Providers know that it is much easier to fill one full-time position with full-time benefits than it is to fill two part-time positions with little or no benefits. The universal aide position

also offers potential employees the opportunity to learn two or three separate jobs within the long term care setting. Employees have a career path that enables them to choose whether or not to pursue a career in dietary or environmental services when other positions open up in those areas.

Jean Yarnall, administrator of Brandywine Hall, a 180-bed skilled nursing facility located in West Chester, Pa., struggled to fill part-time positions for evening shifts in the dietary and housekeeping departments. "I was just not getting the applicants if I offered part-time positions," she says. "Prospective employees felt it was not worth their while to come in for

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such short shifts, especially the weekday and evening meal times. Creating two universal aide positions in our center has filled our needs and enabled us to decrease the use of outside agency staff."

While there are no easy solutions to the staffing challenges facing providers in today's marketplace, the universal aide concept clearly demonstrates that providers who think outside the box can save money while improving recruitment, retention, and staff morale. ■

*Brian Huntoon is a district manager for environmental services for Genesis Hospitality Services, Kennett Square, Pa.*

### For More Information

■ The author can be contacted at (610) 925-1130 ext. 1384 or via email at [Brian.huntoon@ghv.com](mailto:Brian.huntoon@ghv.com).