Nurse Care Managers’ Roles in Navigating Day-to-Day Challenges in Assisted Living Communities

Nurse care managers are the hub of assisted living communities. Their day-to-day tasks range from ensuring prospective residents are assessed before admission to ensuring appropriate care is delivered throughout every resident’s stay. The current editorial discusses the critical roles and challenges of nurse care managers, such as conducting assessments before admission, serving as care coordinators, and assisting with end-of-life decision making, as well as avoiding burnout.

One challenge faced by nurse care managers in performing assessments before admission is that often only snapshots of prospective residents’ medical records are available. This limited information is not enough to determine the best care needs for these individuals or to conduct a comprehensive assessment and develop an appropriate individualized care plan. In addition, at times a particular setting may not meet prospective residents’ needs, and nurse care managers must be tactful in presenting the decision to not admit these individuals who may have had high hopes and been ready to move into the facility. Informing residents that they do not meet facility criteria is challenging and may involve negative emotions. Families can learn more about different assisted living settings and the care needs provided by accessing each community’s Disclosure of Services (required by RCW 18.20.300 [Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, 2017]), which is a regulation that provides general information about an assisted living community. This information can help families understand the assessment outcomes and care provided in the care setting before applying for residency.

In the role of care coordinator, nurse care managers collaborate with residents and families once the resident has moved in to the facility. Expectations for the type and level of care are established early in the assessment process, and if they are not met, residents and family members can become dissatisfied with care. Such breaks in trust are difficult to repair and nurse care managers need to remain vigilant and proactive in managing residents’ care with the rest of the health care team to ensure that care plans are being implemented.

Care coordination with outside agencies that provide services, such as home care and home health services for nursing and physical, occupational, and speech therapy, is another area nurse care managers oversee. The entire care team needs to ensure that the recommendations from these agencies are being implemented.

End-of-life decision making is another area in which nurse care managers can provide educational support.
to families and residents. They educate residents about advance directives and help them make end-of-life decisions as they age in place. They also ensure that residents’ wishes are honored. Nurse care managers have opportunities to provide education and guidance to adult children coping with their aging parents’ chronic conditions. This process is always made easier when social services are involved, and such services are a great resource and support for residents, families, and nurses.

Nurses are trained to think critically and must be able to prioritize and manage the daily aspects and challenges of their work. But how can nurse care managers enjoy this demanding position and avoid burnout? Having an open mindset and open-door policy for everyone involved in the care needs of residents is one way to embrace this position. The leadership team is another resource and support system that is available in each community. Asking employees what matters to them is a way of addressing their needs and creating a positive work environment, which helps manage employee burnout. According to the Institute for Healthcare Improvement Joy in Work Initiative (Perlo et al., 2017), personal coping strategies, such as a sense of competence, which comes with sufficient ongoing clinical training, and a strong team philosophy, are necessary to prevent burnout, prevent high turnover, and attract newer graduates to these roles.

Many important pieces aid in the day-to-day functioning of assisted living communities. Interactions between residents and nurse care managers can make the position of nurse care managers more rewarding. Residents come with a wealth of knowledge from diverse backgrounds, which makes the position interesting and fun. In addition, community stakeholders, leadership teams, social services teams, entire care teams, and outside care agencies and vendors all have an important role to play to make the job manageable. Competitive pay rates, paid vacation time, paid sick leave, and lunch breaks are added incentives for nurse care managers to enjoy and remain in their positions.

According to the American Nurses Association (ANA; 2017) Healthy Nurse, Healthy Nation™ Grand Challenge, nurses have the potential to lead care changes as role models, advocates, and educators. Nurses support patients to live life to the fullest, and they should as well. The ANA believes that a nurse’s well-being must be safeguarded, and that ill health should not be an inevitable by-product of dedicated nursing practice.

REFERENCES

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