

# Improving Resident Care

## Consistent Assignment

Consistent assignment occurs when residents are consistently cared for by the same caregivers, particularly nurses and nursing assistants. Consistent assignments can increase caregivers' familiarity with residents and strengthen relationships among caregivers, residents and their family members

### QAPI STEPS

#### PIP Team Development

Has your organization started implementing a consistent assignment staffing model? Wherever you are on the journey to consistent assignments (also known as permanent assignments), consider creating a Performance Improvement Project (PIP) team to implement and/or monitor the effectiveness and the potential and actual impact of this staffing model.

Consider discussing these topics with your PIP team:

- What is our current staffing model? Does it strengthen relationships between staff and residents? Do we allow for permanent assignments, or do we expect staff members to rotate assignments throughout the building?
- How fair or equitable are our various staff assignments? Do changes need to be made?
- How can we engage staff members in determining the assignments and their scheduling?
- For any one resident, what is the maximum number of caregivers that has provided care within a four-week period? Are there ways we can reduce the numbers of "pairs of hands" that are "touching" each resident?

### DATA

#### Setting a Realistic Goal

Reaching the Advancing Excellence target of 12 or fewer caregivers in a four-week period (for long-stay residents) or in a two-week period (for short-stay residents) can, at first, appear difficult. Don't allow this seemingly impossible target prevent your organization from making strides toward this staffing model. If 12 or fewer caregivers seems out of reach to your PIP team, consider these ideas instead:

- If you have not yet decided to implement consistent assignments, plan meetings to discuss how this staffing model can benefit everyone and strengthen relationships. Meet with residents, family members and staff to talk about why consistent assignment is important and how it can improve communication, quality of care and quality of life for residents. Discuss the positive impact it can have for staff and family members.
- Establish baseline data. If you are not measuring your progress, how will you know if improvements are occurring? The Advancing

Excellence Campaign has tools to help you track your own data; by collecting and monitoring your data you can feel confident in making decisions and helping everyone see the progress over time.

- Start slow! Begin in just one area: Try implementing consistent assignment on just one wing, one unit or one neighborhood. If that still seems overwhelming, try with just one shift on a particular unit or in a particular area.
- Choose a goal that is realistic for each unit or neighborhood, considering baseline data. For example, if a particular resident has 30 caregivers in a four-week period, can that number safely be reduced to 28? Or 26? Consider choosing a stretch goal of 24 or 22, and working slowly to move toward that target.
- Be sure to monitor balancing measures. In other words, as you are reducing the number of staff members who provide care to a resident, what additional results are occurring? Are there concurrent improvements in clinical outcomes, such as lower pressure ulcer rates, fewer falls or less weight loss? Has communication and teamwork improved?

### IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

#### Change Ideas for PDSA Cycles

- Allow nursing assistants to select their own assignments. If fairness of assignments is a concern, begin by using index cards to identify each resident and the level of assistance he or she needs, using a simple numerical rating scale. (For example, 0 means resident needs supervision only with activities of daily living (ADLs); 3 means resident requires maximum assistance for all care).
- Begin building a staffing model by first finding out which residents and staff have established relationships.
- Begin by implementing on one unit or during one shift.
- Design a process to measure the impact of consistent assignment (by using balancing measures). Compare current data with baseline information.
- Continue meeting with staff members periodically; empower them to make adjustments or changes in their assignments.

#### Applying Best Practice Change Concepts

- Assign each staff member consistently to one area/neighborhood of the home so that they can serve one group of residents and care for the same residents almost every time they are on duty.
- Educate staff members, residents and families on the benefits of consistent assignment.
- Involve staff in planning for consistent assignment, and use feedback from residents and families in making assignments.