

St. Joseph County Regional Nursing Home Learning Collaborative

All Hands on Deck Why and How

Overview

“All hands on deck” is a management strategy whereby managers help out hands-on care-giving staff during the busiest times of day. While this is not a long-term substitute for having enough staff, helping out during high stress times has a number of benefits:

1. Residents’ care needs are better met
2. Staff stress is relieved
3. Managers get first hand knowledge of the work-load and workplace dynamics
4. Managers role-model teamwork
5. Builds different and better relationships with staff
6. Breaks the cycle of staff instability

Taken together, these benefits can help break a negative cycle of staff turnover and absenteeism. Staff stress is a primary cause of staff instability. When managers pitch-in during high stress times, they signal that they care about staff and residents, and they provide tangible help that makes the day go better for residents and staff.

Why do it?

Many nursing homes across the country struggle to meet the needs of their residents. While every home is unique, there are some common areas of need. In homes with high turnover or absenteeism, staff are stressed as they try to meet residents’ needs when they are not fully staffed. Even when homes have a full complement of staff they may find times during the day that are extremely labor intensive and stressful.

To alleviate the stress for staff and for residents during these peak times some homes have initiated an approach to care that has come to be known as “All Hands on Deck.” While this approach has many variations, at its core it essentially calls for management staff to pitch in and help during high need times during the day.

This is an extreme intervention, and not a substitute for additional staffing. It is important not to mask the problem of understaffing but instead to use this approach as a bridge to better staffing. It serves as a bridge by reducing the unscheduled absences that come from staff stress, building teamwork so that staff work better together, and by providing the management with a first-hand feel for how the work flows and where more staff is needed.

How: Steps for Successful Implementation

1. **This is a management intervention.** Managers go first. As staff see management roll up their sleeves and help out during these stressful times, others will follow their lead. However, if managers merely direct non-nursing staff to help rather than committing to provide personal assistance, the directive will generate resentment rather than good will. This is a way of building better relationships, having your finger on the pulse of workflow, and role modeling teamwork.
2. **Find out from staff when and what help is needed.** Meet with staff on each unit and shift to ask when they need what type of assistance. Usually meal times are high stress times. Other labor intensive times may be the time around shift change when extra help is needed so that the out-going staff can give report to the incoming staff. Or help may be needed for transportation to an event in the home or an appointment.
3. **Schedule from the top.** Have someone on the management team develop the schedule and communicate it to all units and all management team members.
4. **Be reliable and consistent. Set a schedule and keep to it.** Once a promise is made to help, it is essential to keep the promise. Treat time scheduled for helping on the unit as protected time that cannot be interfered with. Make sure to get a substitute from the management team if you are not able to meet your obligation.
5. **Report in to the charge nurse to be assigned duties during your assigned time to help.** While you may have agreed upon tasks, when you come on the unit, you need to find out what is actually needed right then and there. Checking in with the charge nurse ensures that you can be immediately helpful. It also respects the dynamics on the unit and shores up the chain of leadership.
6. **Help seven days a week.** Weekend staff need the help as well. While it's harder to arrange to help on weekends, doing so will have an enormous positive impact.
7. **Monitor at management team meetings.** At daily stand-up check in on what managers are doing and finding. While all hands on deck is a way of pitching in, it is also a management strategy that gives managers a "finger on the pulse" of care-giving and workplace dynamics. Identify strong performers, solid leaders, and people who need more guidance and development. Talk through ways to use the time on the unit to bring out the best in staff. Note areas of stress and brainstorm interventions that can improve workflow, or areas to target for hiring more staff as you are able.

What types of assistance to provide:

- **Help at meals.** Many residents need a lot of assistance, and eat at a slow pace. Others need to be cued, and talked to so that their meal is enjoyable and digestible. There are many meal related tasks that managers can do that can free up CNAs to provide this intensive assistance. Pass trays. Open milk cartons. Pour drinks. Transport people to the dining room. Get substitute meals from the kitchen. Be a companion to a resident who is eating. Answer call bells while staff assist with meals.
- **Answer call bells.** The majority of call-bells involve requests for non-nursing assistance. However, should you need to ask for a CNA's help, offer to pick-up something that she was doing or ask how you can be of assistance to her.
- **Make fall prevention, comfort rounds, and other check-ins.** Go room to room and ask residents if there is anything they need assistance with. Make sure water pitchers, tv remotes, call-bells and other items are within residents' reach. Do they need a straw, or their water pitcher refilled, or a snack? Does a resident want their face washed at the end of a meal? Non-trained staff need to be very careful about ensuring water pitchers are full, straws available, and snacks given. Residents can be diabetic, unable to have water and a straw due to swallowing problems. Managers need to take their guidance from nursing staff to provide a helping hand.
- **Be a "runner."** Ask unit-staff, "How can I save you some steps?" Offer to make the trip to the kitchen for any food substitutes or refills needed. Does the linen need to be restocked?

Who does it?

Include all department heads and anyone else who regularly attends your management meetings, such as members of nursing management, heads of the business office, admissions, food services, housekeeping, maintenance, activities, and rehabilitation services.

How long is the time period for assistance?

Carve out increments of 15 – 30 minutes, and make a schedule so that every manager knows where they are needed when. You may need some people to help out twice a day in order to have enough people spread out over the busy times on all shifts and all units.