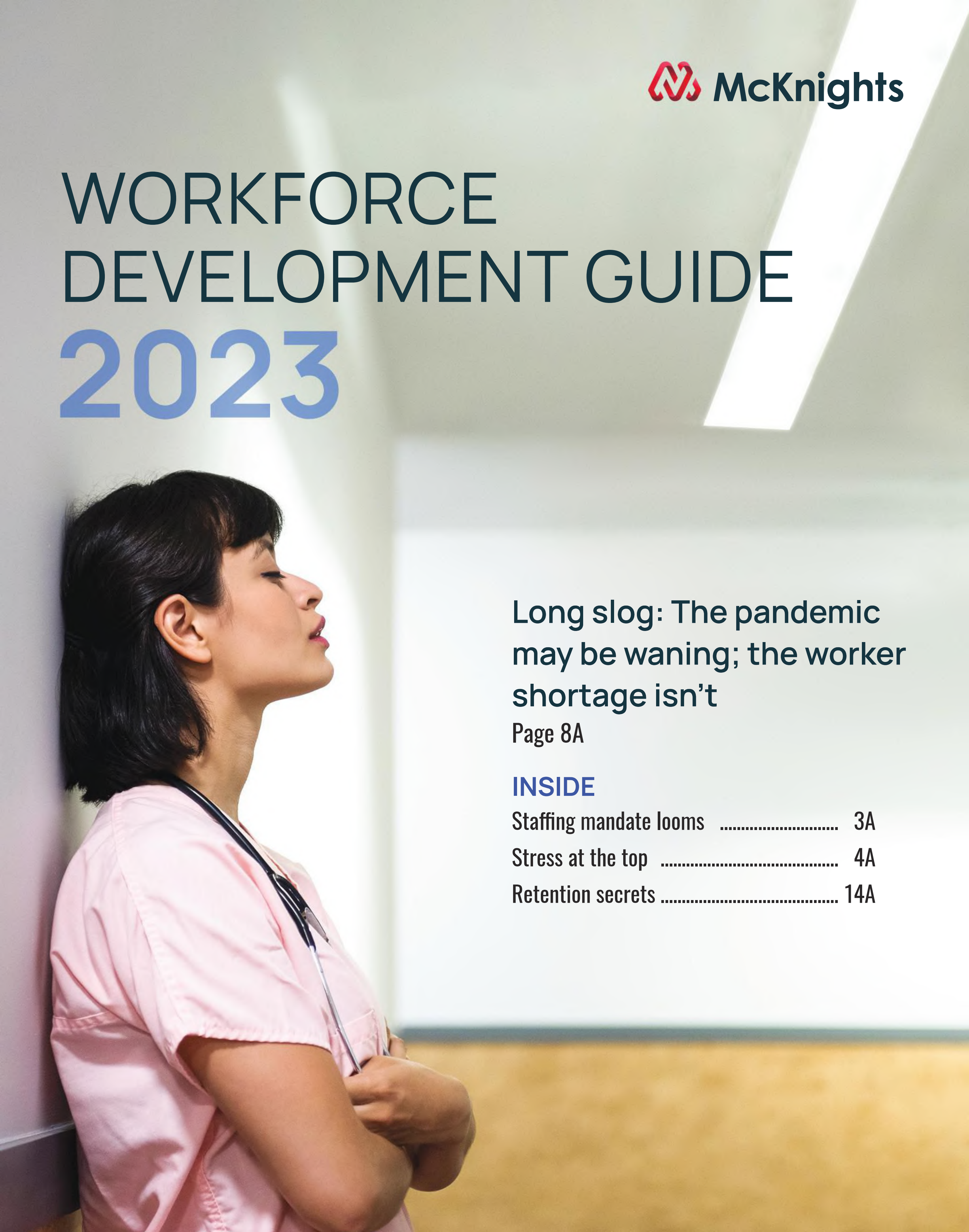

McKnights

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT GUIDE 2023

Long slog: The pandemic may be waning; the worker shortage isn't

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Florence Healthcare Center
Monday, February 20, 2023
All Shifts
SKILL CODE STATUS
ALL ALL ALL
Jane Smith Florence Healthcare Ce... RN Booked
Polly Stevens Florence Healthcare Ce... LPN Booked
Michael Riviera Florence Healthcare Ce... CNA Booked
Trisha Mills Florence Healthcare Ce... CNA Booked
Tyler Pearson Florence Healthcare Ce... CNA Booked
Joseph Timothy Florence Healthcare Ce... RN Booked
Richard Perry Florence Healthcare Ce... RN Booked
Brian Uptown Florence Healthcare Ce... CNA Booked
Kareem Mason Florence Healthcare Ce... RN Booked

Photo: SDI Productions/Getty Images

An impending federal staffing mandate for nursing homes is drawing the ire of the industry.

Upping the ante

A federal staffing mandate looms on the horizon

BY JOHN HALL

Imposed staffing levels are difficult to accept for thousands of struggling nursing homes. But they soon may become a reality. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services promises some version of a minimum staffing rule soon as a way to drive quality improvements in skilled nursing facilities.

Industry advocates generally oppose the mandate. The American Health Care Association backed its opposition with a report showing that implementing a minimum staffing standard of 4.1 hours per resident day would cost up to $11.3 billion per year.

"We would love to hire more nurses and nurse aides, but we cannot meet additional staffing requirements when we can't find people to fill the open positions nor when we do not have the resources to compete against other employers," said Cristina Crawford, an AHCA spokeswoman. "This mandate could require nursing homes to hire nearly 200,000 additional caregivers, when we are already in the midst of a historic labor shortage. An unfunded staffing mandate would exacerbate the current crisis and further limit care access for seniors."

As if to muddy the waters even more, a *Health Affairs* study published in early February found that requiring nursing homes to spend a specific share of revenues on direct care alone won't guarantee that facilities are "adequately" staffed, and concluded instead that other regulatory mechanisms must accompany the mandate.

Why staff shortages?

There are various reasons for existing staff shortages, experts say.

"This is very challenging work that has not been valued appropriately in terms of compensation or working conditions," said David Grabowski, PhD, professor of health-care policy at Harvard Medical School. "If nursing homes cannot change this dynamic, we will see an increase in closures, longer hospital lengths of stay due to fewer discharge options and lower quality of care."

Lindsay Schwartz, PhD, FGSA, founder and principal of Workforce & Quality Innovations LLC, adds to the list an aging labor pool, diminishing numbers of educators, higher-paying competitors such as hospitals, and widespread staff burnout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kathy Douglas, RN, MPH-HA, head of clinical strategy at Prolucent, believes the industry is witnessing the residue of years of long-term care workers "being undervalued, underpaid and overworked."

Crawford blames part of the problem on government ignoring the industry's many years of pleading for comprehensive workforce policies and proposals like loan forgiveness, tax credits, affordable housing, childcare assistance and immigration reform.

Lessons learned

Going forward, the country needs to elevate the importance of direct care workers, Grabowski believes.

"In a typical nursing home, staff have little control over their job and basically must do what their superiors tell them to do," he said. "By comparison, there are a small number of nursing home models that value direct care workers."

He cited the Green House model, in which direct care workers have greater autonomy. This includes setting their own schedules, finding replacements for absent staff, determining resident assignments and deciding how the work will be shared.

Schwartz has a "to do" list for every constituent in the staffing mandate debate.

"For SNFs, create good jobs that people want," she said. "Immigration reforms alone won't change the fact that people want good jobs." ■

STAT

$11.3 billion

A minimum staffing standard would cost up to this much a year.

— American Health Care Association, December 2022

It's tough at the top

Long-term care leaders are facing extreme pressure due to staffing challenges

BY JOHN ROSZKOWSKI


Photo: diego_cervo/Getty Images

Frontline workers are not the only ones experiencing burnout as a result of the pandemic. The stress also has affected upper-level management, some of whom have opted for early retirement.

Faced with unprecedented staffing shortages, rising inflation, new staffing regulations and the remnants of a worldwide pandemic, leaders and executives at nursing homes and assisted living facilities are feeling the pressure like never before.

While much media attention has focused on the stress facing frontline workers since the beginning of the pandemic, workforce challenges aren't relegated just to the front line, according to Bob Lane, MA, CNHA, FACHCA, president and CEO of the American College of Health Care Administrators, which represents healthcare administrators, executive directors, directors of nursing and other leadership positions in the skilled nursing and assisted living industries.

"We do have challenges at the administrator and director of nursing level as well," he said."We are still seeing individuals entering the profession. I think it's more of a case of individuals who may have continued their careers a little bit longer, but the pandemic has really taken a toll on them. We're seeing many of them taking early retirement."

Burnout among upper-level management is high across the long-term care industry, but particularly among positions such as directors of nursing and nursing home administrators, according to Julie Osborne, vice president of post-acute care for LeaderStat, a national staffing, recruiting and consulting firm for the healthcare industry.

"We're seeing a lot of burnout in those positions, particularly post-pandemic," she said. "For directors of nursing, the burnout rate is extreme. People who were even thinking of retiring have opted to go that route because of the stress."

Staffing shortages create stress

For directors of nursing and nursing home administrators, Osborne feels the biggest challenge is finding enough staff to fill required shifts. Staffing shortages will be further complicated by impending staffing regulations, which will require nursing homes to increase staff-to-resident ratios.

"From an operations perspective, when you're a director of nursing or an administrator and are working the front lines, the staffing crisis just seems overwhelming," Osborne said.

Because of a shortage of directors of nursing, many organizations have had to offer higher salaries and even signing bonuses to attract and retain people for those positions. The national average salary for a director of nurses at nursing homes was $108,799 in 2022, a 5.4% increase over 2021, according to the Hospital & Healthcare Compensation Service 2022-2023 Nursing Home Salary and Benefits Report. And the average sign-on bonus for a new director of nursing was $6,950, the report found.

Christina Johnson, senior executive recruiter for MedBest, a recruiting firm for leadership positions in the skilled nursing and senior living industries, said labor management issues and the staffing crisis are the top challenges facing most leaders and administrators in the industry today.

"There are a number of factors in labor management — salaries and compensation have had to go up significantly," Johnson said. "Because of the staffing shortage, there is an exorbitant amount of overtime. Because of the shortage, there's an exorbitant amount of agency staff being used, which usually costs two to three times more than regular staff.

"The other part of labor management is turnover, because there's unprecedented competition for licensed nurses and CNAs," she added. "Turnover is higher than ever, and that is very costly for organizations."

Nursing homes probably face the greatest staffing challenges because they have more stringent staffing-related regulations than assisted living communities and are typically required to use certified nursing staff to provide care, while assisted living can use more noncertified staff to fill positions, Johnson said.

But Johnson said assisted living communities have their own challenges. Many of these organizations are in desperate need of sales directors because their occupancy fell significantly during the pandemic and they need to fill units. "Many organizations want previous industry experience, and that's often hard to find," she said.

Johnson said assisted living communities also face competition for leadership positions from nursing homes and hospitals, which typically can pay higher salaries.

For example, the average national salary for a nursing home administrator was $124,297 in 2022, according to the HCS 2022-2023 Nursing Home Salary and Benefits Report. By comparison, the average salary for an assisted living administrator was $96,267, according to HCS' annual assisted living report.

Demand for corporate-level executives

While many organizations struggle to fill and retain upper-level management and administrative positions, some top corporate positions such as CEOs and chief financial officers are also in demand, according to Matt Leach, principal and senior consultant at Total Compensation Solutions, a human resources consulting firm for the long-term care industry specializing in executive compensation.

Leach said the industry lost many people in top corporate positions to early retirement or other industries during the pandemic, and as a result, there are fewer people to fill these positions.

"Like with all levels within these organizations, we're seeing higher turnover [at the executive level] than in the past," he said. The annual turnover rate for top-level executives at nursing homes was about 32% in 2022 and over 25% for assisted living communities, according to the HCS salary and benefits reports for the industries.

While corporate executives may not feel the same daily stress as frontline healthcare workers or upper-level managers, they do face other pressures, particularly on the financial side of the business. Inflation has hit many organizations hard, Leach said, and government reimbursements aren't keeping pace with escalating wages.

"If you're running an organization and you're not able to stick to the budget, there are going to be problems for the organization as a whole, including less money for executive compensation," he said.

Osborne notes that budgetary issues are a major concern for all corporate executives in long-term care today.

"If your reimbursement isn't changing to keep up with inflation, it's a matter of cash flow," she said. "How do you continue operating with less? I think those are the things that keep executives up at night, and I think those stressors are commonplace throughout the industry."

Salaries have increased for corporate level positions in long-term care, but at a slower rate than for workers at the bottom end of the pay scale. The 2022-2023 Multi-Facility Corporate Compensation report from HCS shows an average annual salary increase of 3.17% for long-term care corporate executives at large multisite organizations. By comparison, some workers at the lower end of the pay scale are seeing increases of 10% or more.

Leach said all organizations, whether they be nursing homes or senior living communities, need to be competitive in their compensation to attract and retain upper-level talent.

"In terms of attracting talent, it usually means higher pay," he said. "We often hear about work-life balance, but if you're looking to attract people and don't have competitive pay, it's going to be much tougher."

In addition to salaries, Leach said many organizations are offering incentive plans for executives who meet budgetary goals, as well as retention bonuses. Deferred compensation packages and supplemental retirement plans also can be important ways to ensure top executives stay with organizations long-term.

Smaller organizations and single-site facilities need to ensure their compensation packages are competitive, because multisite organizations often look to hire administrators and CEOs from smaller operators due to their experience, Leach said.

"The smaller facilities need to be aware of what the larger facilities are doing, because that's really where the competition is," he said.

Overall, Johnson observes, there still seems to be a strong pool of candidates for C-suite level positions in long-term care, especially compared with facility-level managers such as directors of nursing, where the pool of potential candidates has shrunk significantly.

"When we search for corporate vice presidents and other C-suite positions, we do not lack a good pool of candidates," Johnson said. ■

STAT

$124,297

This was the average salary of a nursing home administrator in 2022.

– Hospital & Healthcare Compensation Service (HCS) 2022-2023 Nursing Home Salary and Benefits Report

STAT

$96,267

This was the average salary of an assisted living administrator in 2022.

– Hospital & Healthcare Compensation Service (HCS) 2022-2023 Assisted Living Salary and Benefits Report

shiftkey

SAMI: The tech integration spurring an increase in resident occupancy rates

Data insight that empowers better care, a more human experience

By Tom Ellis, President & CEO, ShiftKey

I started ShiftKey as a way to support a more empowered option for both the licensed professionals and facilities. The idea was to give facilities access to a marketplace of independent professionals that would allow them to make short and long-term workforce decisions without passing through a go-between and losing more money. Our platform gives licensed professionals independence and flexibility - every shift is a choice. They provide services to facilities because they care deeply about patients.

Over the last year, we've made major strides towards this vision through a strategic investment in OnShift, and now the launch of the Schedule Automation Marketplace Integration (SAMI). SAMI is a first-of-its-kind system that combines the full power of ShiftKey's workforce marketplace and OnShift's schedule view and analytics, presenting facilities with the resources and insights to make strategic workforce decisions in the short and long-term.

We've tested our theory and ***Tutera Senior Living & Health Care***, among many others in post-acute care and senior living, has been a strong partner in this, showing compelling results and providing honest feedback.

With Tutera, here's what we discovered:

7% Increase in Resident Occupancy Rate

Tutera focuses on getting to know residents and team members on a personal level, leaning into their unique preferences and personalities to inform care and actions. This is precisely what SAMI is meant to elevate: Getting facilities out of survival mode, back into growth mode, with a focus on attentive patient care and relief as needed for facility employees.

Ultimately, the goal is to be able to serve as many patients as possible with the quality of care that they deserve. While the aging population in need of care grows, facilities have been forced to make the difficult decision to turn away residents due to inadequate workforce levels. With SAMI, those days are over.

90% Reduction in Unfilled Shifts

With all the tools to proactively build a comprehensive schedule, SAMI has given Tutera the ability to view employees and independent healthcare professionals in a single system. Paired with SAMI's consolidated real-time reporting, Tutera has been able to make strategic decisions and tap into a network of licensed professionals any time they need it. Dynamic access to independent care professionals reduces burnout among your current team and complements them with individuals who are not only qualified, but who also want to be there.

20% Increase in Employee Shift Requests

Tutera full-time facility employees are requesting more shifts after the integration than ever before. This is a theme I've seen consistently across different facilities using the technology. Facilities are using SAMI's comprehensive data to forecast available shifts and facility employees can now plan ahead and tap into future schedules. However, when additional workers are required to support occupancy growth and fill openings, SAMI provides automated access to the ShiftKey marketplace, leveraging a vast, licensed talent pool to fill select shifts. This seamless integration and consistent shift coverage provides relief for scheduling directors and facility employees.

100% Total Workforce Transparency

Across the board, SAMI provides total workforce visibility, optimization and cost savings. Tutera has been able to leverage SAMI to achieve complete workforce transparency, building employee trust, reducing burnout, meeting staffing ratios and delivering high-quality care. Joe Schiller, Tutera's Vice President of Human Resources, will tell you himself that SAMI has elevated the way they do business: "The way SAMI seamlessly integrates ShiftKey's robust marketplace with OnShift's scheduling capabilities has completely transformed our workforce strategy. We now have access to workforce coverage paired with key data insights to help us strategically grow our business, take great care of our residents, and put us in a prime position for our hospital referral partnerships."

At ShiftKey, we will never stop developing and leveraging tech solutions to efficiently solve workforce needs. The SAMI tech integration is just the tip of the iceberg as we continue to serve as a trusted business partner for facilities who share our core values in solving workforce challenges, unlocking the full potential of technology, and keeping people – patients and licensed professionals – at the center.

"The way SAMI seamlessly integrates ShiftKey's robust marketplace with OnShift's scheduling capabilities has completely transformed our workforce strategy..."

- Joe Schiller, Vice President of HR at Tutera Senior Living & Health Care

Seeking CNAs

Worker shortages may be improving on paper, but challenges remain

Photo: Hispanolistic/Getty Images

Long-term care is losing certified nursing assistants and other frontline positions to food service and retail competitors, which are offering about the same or more for jobs that require no special training or certification. This has been one of the major predicaments of the long-term care industry.

BY RACHAEL ZIMLICH, RN, BSN

Shortages in the long-term care workforce are not a new problem, but the COVID-19 pandemic didn't do anything to improve them.

Consider that several years ago, in a Health Services Insights report examining outcomes at long-term care facilities between 2009 and 2016, insufficient staffing levels were largely to blame for nearly $3 million worth of adverse events ranging from substandard care to delays in treatment. At the time, there were about 1.65 million employees in America's nursing homes.

It's worse now. Nursing homes have about 1.37 million workers, after losing an estimated 210,000 workers over the course of the pandemic, according to the American Health Care Association's January 2023 Long-Term Care Jobs Report. Current staffing is at a level not seen since 1994, AHCA said.

"The data doesn't lie," AHCA President and Chief Executive Officer Mark Parkinson said. "This is not just an exaggerated call for help, and this labor crisis will not go away on its own or through government enforcement."

Coming up short

But what types of jobs within long-term care are seeing the greatest shortages? Certified nursing assistant positions were difficult to fill before the pandemic, as some form of training or state certification is required. Filling them is even harder now, though, since many fast food and retail locations are able to match or even exceed the starting wages for these positions. The national average starting wage of a CNA is around $15 per hour, but food service and retail jobs are offering about the same or more for jobs that require no special training or certification.

Robyn Stone, DrPH, senior vice president of research at LeadingAge and co-director of the LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston says, like many industries, residential care and skilled nursing facilities have struggled the most when it comes to filling lower-wage positions. This includes not just CNAs, but also food service, environmental and maintenance staff. Even when these positions can be filled, Stone notes that 60% to 80% of staff turnover happens in

STAT

210,000

This is the number of workers nursing homes have lost over the course of the pandemic.

– American Health Care Association, January 2023

these areas, among the people who provide the most direct care to long-term care residents.

There is a staffing challenge in upper-level positions, too, she says, but it's more a problem with experience and training rather than sheer numbers.

"We certainly have turnover in professional managerial positions," Stone said. "There's 'the great resignation' and the 'great retirement' as upper levels of management are reaching retirement age."

The aging workforce is its own problem, she says, adding that in the next five to seven years, retirements are expected to increase — but so too will the number of people requiring care in senior living communities and nursing homes.

"Demand will be increasing, but you have a shrinking workforce that would be in the age category that would be taking these jobs," Stone said.

Things are better, still not great

There has been some recovery as the pandemic has eased, but it appears as though these gains are overshadowed by earlier losses.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, healthcare filled 58,000 job openings in January, and the majority of those were in long-term or residential care facilities rather than hospitals. This number eclipsed the total from January 2022, when just 18,000 healthcare jobs were added — and few of them in nursing and residential care. At the time, BLS reported that healthcare jobs in 2022 were nearly 400,000 short of peak pre-pandemic levels.

As bad as this may sound, there has been improvement, though. Healthcare lost 30,000 jobs in January 2021, with nursing care facilities, home health and community care facilities reporting the majority of those losses. Overall, BLS reported in early 2021 that more than 540,000 healthcare jobs had been lost in less than a year since the start of the pandemic.

Prior to COVID, the situation actually was looking up for healthcare employment, with 36,000 healthcare jobs added in January 2020 and 42,000 added in January 2019.

Pre-COVID, the biggest concerns for employers were replacing retiring baby boomers as fast as they left, and having adequate training and recruitment programs, especially for nursing and other jobs. In the years since COVID started, though, many reports have noted increasing rates of early retirement among the baby boomer population at the same time that lucrative hospital and agency contracts lure staff away from long-term care.

Looking ahead

Despite some small gains in employment numbers compared with the last several years, it's difficult to be optimistic about finding workers for long-term care positions going forward.

In a State of the Nursing Home Industry report from June 2022, AHCA revealed that most skilled nursing facilities considered their staffing situations to be getting much worse during the previous year. Moderate-to-severe staffing shortages were reported by 87% of the facilities polled for the survey, and 98% admitted difficulty in filling open positions. A lack of interested or qualified candidates was one of the challenges these facilities reported, but matching financial incentives offered by other employers was another. To make up for these shortfalls, 99% of facilities have asked existing staff to work overtime, 71% turned to temporary or agency staff and 61% limited new admissions. These changes have led to an average 41% increase in operating costs, and about 73% of facilities were at least somewhat worried about the fate of their business if these problems continue.

STAT

58,000

Healthcare filled this number of jobs in January 2023.

– Bureau of Labor Statistics

Stone says staffing has always been a problem in long-term care, but perhaps one of the best things to come out of COVID is a better recognition of what kinds of changes are needed for the future.

"I think people have recognized that there is no magic solution," Stone said. "I do believe that the organizations that are really working more on developing healthy workplace cultures do a better job of retaining their staff."

And Jim White, chief culture/experience officer for Ignite Medical Resorts, has the numbers to back that theory. Ignite is a chain of medical rehabilitation facilities in the Midwest that focuses on offering residents five-star luxury experiences.

As employment crunches became worse, White says Ignite recognized that this same "high-end" model needed to be carried over into the workforce. Changes were made to improve the overall company culture and employee experience, and turnover rates decreased from about 39% at the height of the pandemic to 32% this year — a number that slipped below even pre-COVID turnover rates.

Ignite still has staffing needs, but White says the changes that have been made at the company level have helped its facilities stay competitive.

"We have the same staffing issues that other companies have," White said. "We just try to get in front of them by having something laid down to make employees want to stay, instead of chasing them when they want to leave." ■


Rip off
your staffing
band aid!

Stay engaged

These 4 best practices will improve supervisors' well-being

BY MICHELE HOLLERAN, PHD, MBA

In the midst of steep workforce challenges, there is some encouraging news, according to the Holleran employee engagement benchmark third-quarter 2022 numbers: supervisor loyalty.

When asked whether they think they will be working at their senior living community three years from now, 46.4% answered positively. What's more, the number of supervisors who are in the highest engagement category (we call these folks "catalysts") is at its highest level in recent history, even greater than pre-pandemic.

What accounts for this level of loyalty and engagement among our supervisors?

One hypothesis is that supervisors who were less engaged left during the pandemic, and those who stayed were those who had the highest commitment levels and passion for the field. Although the pandemic took its toll on many employees, including the supervisors, it brought out the best in those with the tenacity and resilience to tough it out. And, if any doubt existed earlier that their role was critical and made a difference in the lives of older adults, the pandemic took all doubt away. The supervisors knew for sure that they were the glue that was holding senior living communities together. Their jobs had more meaning than ever before.

Supervisors were put to the test when it came to building strong relationships with their teams. In response, they became more compassionate and humanistic, realizing that their co-workers needed them to be there in a different way than before.

The old adage that "people don't leave their organizations, they leave their supervisors," is more true than ever. Therefore, focusing on our supervisor well-being has never been more important. Here are some best practices for improving supervisor well-being.

"Executive leaders, don't offer advice."

– MICHELE HOLLERAN, HOLLERAN CONSULTING

1. Conduct a well-being inventory of all your supervisors.

Find out what their stressors are, as a group and individually.

Holleran collects employee well-being statistics around the major stressors among senior living workers and found that workload, household bills and personal mental health top the list. Yet each supervisor is facing her or his own challenges, and determining the exact nature of those individual challenges is a great place to start.

One-on-one meetings to elicit this customized information are recommended. Time-consuming, but worth the effort.

2. Offer more support to supervisors.

Mental health resources, a personal or group life coach, more time off — customize the support as much as possible without violating rules of fairness.

3. Check in often with supervisors to see how they are doing.

Executive leaders, don't offer advice. Rather, listen deeply and perhaps offer solutions, if appropriate. People need to be heard these days more than ever.

Great open-ended questions include: "How are things going for you this week?" "What does help look like for you?" "How can this community better support you?" or simply "What's on your mind these days?"

The holidays are particularly stressful for many people. Holding group meditation sessions, reducing the number of meetings supervisors are required to attend, sponsoring fun events, lightening the mood with positive energy and laughter — it's often the small gestures that make a big impact on others.

4. Show appreciation.

A handwritten note sent to the supervisor's home. A small gift that shows you care. A word of encouragement to someone who seems overwhelmed or disengaged.

The importance of supervisor engagement and loyalty cannot be underestimated. Most senior living workers leave within the first 90 days of the beginning of employment. Supporting supervisors and role-modeling the right leadership behaviors will have a trickle-down effect on the rest of the workforce, especially those new hires.

Although many new systems are being put in place to try to reduce the effects of employee turnover (robots, same-day pay, retention bonuses), no substitute exists for strengthening human relationships at work. The more we can encourage supervisors to take better care of their own needs, the more they will have the capacity to support their teams and, in turn, reduce turnover. ■

Michele Holleran is founder and CEO of Holleran Consulting, an employee and resident research firm offering engagement and satisfaction surveys and other assessments to strengthen senior living organizations. Holleran can be reached at michele@holleranconsult.com.

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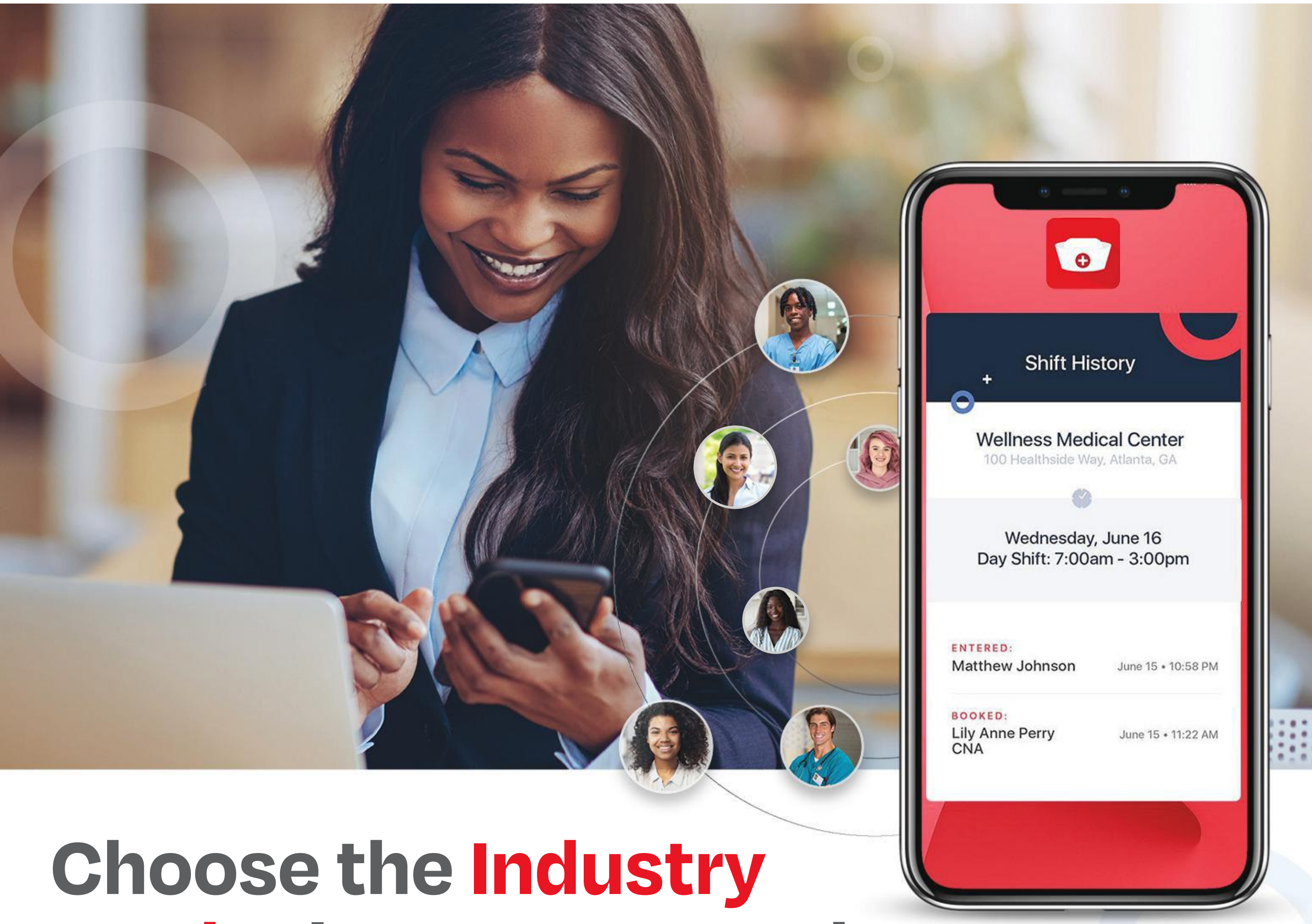

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Photo: PeopleImages/Getty Images

There is not one answer to fixing the worker shortage. Most agree that empowering employees is a key factor in improving retention.

Think broadly

Wages help attract workers, but it's company culture that keeps them around

BY RACHAEL ZIMLICH, RN, BSN

Every industry is struggling to fill jobs in positions that require less training and pay lower wages. Fast food companies and retailers have been increasing wages to keep their doors open, but the solution isn't as easy in long-term care.

Certified nursing assistants don't require a college degree, but they do need to complete state certifications. While it's a job that can be rewarding in many ways, it can be a tough sell to ask workers to become trained and work a high-stress job for almost the same pay as a worker at Chick-fil-A (and they get every Sunday off, too).

So what's the solution?

No one really knows that answer to that question for sure, but most agree that there isn't any singular change that will help fill jobs in long-term care.

Kezia Scales, PhD, vice president of research and evaluation at PHI, says it will take a multifaceted, holistic approach to change the game in long-term care. This may seem overwhelming, but Scales says it can start by asking existing employees a simple question: What do you want?

Robyn Stone, DrPH, senior vice president of research at LeadingAge and co-director of the LeadingAge LTSS Center @UMass Boston, agrees there is not one solution. Wage increases aren't enough to attract good workers anymore, because wages are going up in most industries, she says. The real problem in long-term care, she says, may be more of an image issue.

"We've always had trouble recruiting nurses," Stone said. "RNs are either interested in going to the hospitals, or they get older and they are retiring."

Stone says she's heard from many nurses that long-term care is not the first place anyone really thinks to go after nursing school. Nursing homes can be painted as a less-desirable job in nursing, but Stone says a different outlook could help change that.

More focus on the opportunities and autonomy offered in the long-term care setting could be selling points for nursing staff, and Stone says courses in geriatrics or long-term care in nursing schools could do a lot to help entice new nurses.

"There are a lot of opportunities in long-term care, but I don't think they're made very clear," she said.

Missing out?

On the other hand, the industry is missing out on opportunities in recruiting CNAs and support staff, too, says Ashante Abubakar, vice-president of workforce development at Argentum, a senior living trade association.

In prior roles at recruiting and workforce development centers, Abubakar says he saw thousands of job seekers walk through the door on a daily basis. Now, these are not people who necessarily have experience or the desire to work in long-term care, but they just may be the perfect candidates.

"Every industry today is suffering from the same chronic shortages of people, but that's what has led me down this path to help open all doorways," he said. "There's a wealth of human capital out there that didn't necessarily go through a four-year university."

There are federal, state and community resources offered to workforce development and recruitment programs, and long-term care isn't always looking at these candidates, he says. These may be immigrants who had highly qualified jobs whose credentials didn't follow them to the United States, formerly incarcerated individuals looking to re-enter the workforce, or young workers who are generally inexperienced.

"There's an opportunity to engage in terms of finding talent," Abubakar said. "And I don't know that a lot of companies are looking at all the resources."

Like Stone, Abubakar suggests increasing outreach with educational institutions — and not just at four-year colleges. Recruiting efforts are minimal at community colleges and other programs that focus more on job training than degrees. Abubakar says he believes that contacting these training programs and even high schools could help plant the seed about a career in healthcare services in people who may not have ever considered these positions.

Stop the bleeding

Even with all the best recruitment strategies, though, the industry won't get very far in stemming staffing shortages if it doesn't stop losing existing workers.

Temporary staff and wage increases can only take you so far, Scales says, adding that there is value in improving overall job culture and helping even unlicensed staff play a role in care planning and development. The simple act of asking a dietary aide or CNA about their interactions and observations with residents can help improve buy-in and make them feel like a valued part of the team, she says.

STAT

$13.20

This is the average hourly wage for a Chick-fil-A team member.

— Indeed.com

STAT

$16.88

This was the average hourly wage of a nursing home CNA in 2022.

— Hospital & Healthcare Compensation Service (HCS) 2022-2023 Nursing Home Salary & Benefits Report

Jim White, chief culture/experience officer at Ignite Medical Resorts, which is based in Kansas City, MO, says improving the employee experience at the Midwestern rehabilitation and wellness chain has gone a long way in improving both recruitment and retention.

"We put this employee engagement idea at the forefront of all of our buildings," White said. "We've been pretty stable and we've been able to hang on to the majority of the workforce we have. I don't think it's just the rewards and recognition program, either. I think it's that way our facilities make sure our employees come first and that we take care of them so that they take care of our guests."

The rewards and recognition program White referenced uses things such as paid-time off and cash rewards accumulated with hours worked to reward employees. At the same time, White says the program also helps to hold employees who are not high-performers accountable for things the employee can control, such as missed shifts or lateness, and works these into the rewards program. Infractions reduce the level of incentives that can be earned, but don't necessarily translate to any type of disciplinary action.

Culture matters

Cultural shifts are also a big part of the success at Ignite, according to White. From the top down, there's an effort to make sure staff feel respected, valued and appreciated so that they pass those same virtues along to the residents they are caring for.

This isn't to say that Ignite doesn't also rely on staffing agencies and sign-on bonuses. It does, White says, but it tries to avoid relying on these strategies as a whole.

"We always took the approach that if you're offering sign-on bonuses, we think it makes the company look desperate for help," White said.

Instead, Ignite offers a referral bonus to existing workers who recommend new hires. This usually leads to the hiring of workers who will stay, instead of job hoppers who look for incentives, stay just long enough to earn them and then leave for another opportunity.

Ignite also created its own internal staffing agency that can be used to manage scheduling challenges across multiple locations, he says.

LeadingAge's Stone says there is something to places that have developed and maintained strong workplace cultures throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. They haven't had as significant losses of staff or the burnout seen elsewhere, Stone points out.

"We're in such a crisis that it's really hard to catch up in terms of how you create that culture and all those investments," Stone said. "But there seems to be more recognition and appreciation for staff retention, and a lot more experimenting and a lot more attention when it comes to mental health."

Going forward, culture seems to be king in terms of what can help solve ongoing staffing problems. Attention will have to be paid to recruiting and retaining good employees, holding bad employees accountable, and the mental health toll healthcare can have on its workforce. The pandemic made all of these problems perhaps a bit more evident, but it didn't create them.

Culture is driven from the top down, White says, and it's only through top-down changes in both operations and mentality that change will happen.

"We have an employee-first culture in which we want to show our employees how much they matter and mean to us so that they will take care of our guests," he said. ■

We are solving the healthcare workforce crisis **and providing a new paradigm for workforce training.**

An innovative, 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Dwyer Workforce Development (DWD) provides individuals lacking opportunity with free healthcare job training, wraparound services – such as financial support for housing, childcare, and transportation – case management, job placement support in healthcare facilities, and future opportunity for additional education and workforce training scholarships.

With an 82-percent stick rate, DWD is providing paths toward life-changing careers that will lead to better lives, while also supporting the healthcare workforce and improving the lives of seniors. As, DWD expands its national footprint, it's looking for partners to get involved and make donations to further its mission.

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Jack and Nancy Dwyer Workforce Development Center, Inc.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to provide comprehensive support to individuals who lack opportunity and aspire to pursue a career in the healthcare industry, alleviate a severe healthcare workforce shortage and improve the lives of seniors.

TRANSFORMING LIVES AND SENIOR CARE

Jack and Nancy Dwyer Workforce Development Center, Inc. (Dwyer Workforce Development, or DWD), is a one-of-a-kind 501(c)(3) nonprofit that disrupts the traditional approach to solving the healthcare workforce crisis and provides a new paradigm for workforce training.

Dwyer Workforce Development provides free job training, wraparound services — which include financial support for housing, childcare, transportation and more — case management and job placement support in healthcare facilities for program participants. Known as Dwyer Scholars, certified nursing assistant (CNA) candidates are guided through classroom time, as well as their clinical work.

Working with other not-for-profits, partner workforce development organizations, and training partners, Dwyer Scholars complete their training, participate in clinicals, and then take the Board of Nursing exam. Once certified, Dwyer Workforce Development places Dwyer Scholars into full-time positions through its large network of industry partners, including nursing homes and long-term care facilities.

Dwyer Scholars are paired with case managers who work closely together to identify career ladder goals for Dwyer Scholars to achieve over several years — keeping them on track for success. After reaching those goals, Dwyer Scholars are awarded a full scholarship to achieve their Registered Nurse license or to pursue additional advanced training for other healthcare careers.

Providing better education and creating pathways for career advancement not only benefits Dwyer Scholars, but also supports the senior healthcare workforce and improves the lives of seniors, through increased quality of care and attention.

Launched in Maryland, DWD trained and placed more than 287 CNAs in Maryland in 2022. With an 82% retention rate, Dwyer Scholars fill crucial roles in the senior healthcare industry, an industry hard-hit by employment shortages.

Dwyer Workforce Development recently expanded into Texas with a notable 64-facility portfolio acquisition. Currently accepting applications for Dwyer Scholars in Maryland and Texas, DWD anticipates training up to 2,880 Dwyer Scholars in 2023. DWD plans to continue its growth throughout the country.

BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Dwyer Workforce Development partners with organizations that share its commitment to providing comprehensive support to individuals who lack opportunity and aspire to pursue a career in the healthcare industry, alleviating a severe healthcare workforce shortage and improving the lives of seniors.

If you're a healthcare organization, workforce development program or human services professional interested in partnering with Dwyer Workforce Development, please email *info@dwyerworkforcedev.org*.

As Dwyer Workforce Development continues to grow, donations are much appreciated and used toward the further development of curriculums as well as wraparound service support, future programming and scholarships. Donations are gladly accepted through *www.dwyerworkforcedev.org/donate*.

In addition to donations, there are many ways to take action to be part of the solution – volunteering time and expertise, sharing social posts to amplify the Dwyer Workforce Development message, making introductions with interested corporate or not-for-profit partners or sponsors and more. For more on opportunities, visit *www.dwyerworkforcedev.org*.

DWYER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

FASTFACTS

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Date Founded:
2021

Presence:
Dwyer Workforce Development is headquartered in Baltimore, MD, and serves communities throughout Maryland, Texas and across the country.

Guardian Pharmacy Services

COMPANY PROFILE

Guardian Pharmacy Services is one of the largest and fastest-growing long-term care pharmacy companies in the United States. Through our national network of pharmacies, we provide a wide range of services to assisted living and skilled nursing communities, mental health, hospice and PACE organizations, and those that serve individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We conduct business according to the Golden Rule, treating our customers, residents and each other fairly and honestly. Guardian's commitment to excellence and to providing outstanding customer service defines our corporate character and inspires us every day.

WHAT WE DO

Guardian pharmacies work hard to understand each customer and the specific needs of their community. We develop meaningful relationships with the communities and organizations we serve to create fully-integrated and customized pharmacy solutions that ensure safety, accuracy and resident satisfaction.

OUR MISSION

Guardian aims to personally empower our customers with the resources they need to provide the best service to their residents. We maintain the highest level of service and sensitivity required to meet the individualized needs of each community.

THE GUARDIAN WAY

Guardian Pharmacy Services has a unique business model that allows us to offer both the personalized services of a local pharmacy as well as the resources of a national provider. Each Guardian Pharmacy is vested with the authority to make day-to-day decisions at the local level. Assisting our pharmacies is the corporate Guardian Pharmacy Services team in Atlanta, who provides support in areas such as accounting, IT, recruiting, etc. This support allows the local pharmacy team to focus on customers and the specific needs of their market. We believe this business approach leads to better customer service, greater accuracy and efficiency of medication management.

WHAT WE OFFER

Clinical Support

Guardian streamlines processes and helps integrate multiple eMAR/EHR technologies to make sure medication management is efficient and error-free. Our pharmacies regularly meet with community staff through on-site visits, and host continuing education and training courses to help lower the risk of medication errors and enhance the level of resident care.

Simplified Billing

Medication billing can be challenging for any long-term care provider, but it doesn't have to be. All billing, dispensing, consulting and customer service are handled by the local pharmacy, not from a remote hub. We educate residents and families on Medicare Part D plans that best fit their needs and help reduce costs. From prior authorizations and noncovered medications to the "donut hole," our local experts take the extra steps and make the extra time to ensure there are no billing issues or questions.

Seamless Pharmacy Transition

Guardian offers hands-on support to new customers making a pharmacy switch. We work hard to ease the transition process by coordinating timelines that reduce burden on the community and save staff time.

FASTFACTS

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300 Galleria Parkway SE, Suite 800, Atlanta, GA 30339

Date Founded:
2004

Presence:
Guardian Pharmacy Services is based in Atlanta, Georgia, and currently has 43 pharmacy locations that serve nearly 156,000 patients across 33 states.

We don't say it, the communities who use us do.

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