



Advancing Excellence in America's Nursing Homes is a national campaign to improve the quality of care and life for the country's 1.5 million people receiving care in nursing homes. Nursing homes, their staff and consumers can join in this effort by working on the campaign goals, designed to improve quality.

www.nhqualitycampaign.org

Goal #8: Consistent Assignment

What does consistent assignment mean?

Consistent assignment (also called primary or permanent assignment) means that residents see the same caregivers (registered nurse, licensed practical nurse or certified nurse aide) or team of caregivers almost every time they are on duty. Many residents are more comfortable with caregivers who know and understand their personal preferences and caregiving needs.

The goals of consistent assignment are to stabilize staffing and establish strong bonds between residents and staff and among co-workers to provide consistent caregiving.

When a nursing home adopts "consistent assignment," it means that the home wants to build and sustain relationships between individual residents, their families and friends and nurse aides.

How is consistent assignment achieved?

For most homes, using consistent assignment means they give up rotating nurse aides and nurses from one neighborhood, wing or floor every two to 12 weeks. Staff are "permanently" assigned to one area of the home and therefore to one group of residents. These consistent or permanent assignments apply to nurses and nurse aides but can also extend to housekeeping, dietary and other members of the caregiving team.

Of course, it is not possible for the same nurse aide or nurse to work the same shift every day of the week. Staff need time off or may need to change their work hours. As a result, residents may see the same team of caregivers during the week. But, they may see a different team on weekends and holidays. For the Advancing Excellence campaign, a nursing home is successful using "consistent assignment" when staff are caring for the same residents on at least 80% to 85% (percent) of their shifts. This means on at least four out of five days, evenings and nights.

What should you know about consistent assignment?

Consistent assignment is a key step in giving care that is individualized (resident-centered). This is because relationships are central to both quality care for residents and family. Consistent assignment also improves job satisfaction for caregivers, due to their stronger bonds with residents.

Benefits for Residents:

- Don't have to explain to new aides how to care for them day after day.
- Makes the intimate aspects of care feel more comfortable.
- Helps residents with dementia be much more comfortable with familiar caregiver faces. The caregivers know how the residents speak through their behaviors.
- Makes them feel secure and builds bonds with staff over time.

Benefits for Consistently Assigned Caregivers:

- Caregivers know what each resident wants and needs and can tailor their care. They can give better care and are more organized in their work.
- Nurses and nurse aides that work with the same residents most of the time are more likely to notice slight changes in their health. This can prevent larger health problems.
- Caregivers are more likely to understand and respond to the behaviors of residents with dementia. Residents are letting others know what they want and need through their actions.
- Many staff members embrace caregiving because of their desire to help other people and to make a difference in the life of another. They say that consistent assignment is necessary to make that difference.
- Caregivers experience the satisfaction of knowing that, on a daily basis, they are making a resident's life better.

Benefits for Nursing Homes:

- Consistent assignment helps nursing homes keep the same staff, because staff is more familiar caring for the same people every day. Staff gets to know each resident's routines and bonds with him or her, making a better workplace.
- Caregiver absences are reduced and they are more likely to stay in the job when meaningful relationships develop. Caregivers know they are being counted on and respond by making sure that the needed care is given.

How can consumers learn about consistent assignment in any nursing home?

- Talk with residents about whether they have a nurse aide who cares for them most days. If the resident cannot answer or has dementia, talk with the family.
- Ask nurse aides if they work with the same residents daily over the long term or whether they sometimes rotate to another group of residents.
- Ask the director of nursing and the nursing home administrator how nurse aides are assigned to care for certain residents. Does the nursing home use consistent assignment?

How can consumers encourage consistent assignment?

- If the nursing home does not currently use consistent assignment, encourage the director of nursing and the nursing home administrator to test it on a smaller scale (one neighborhood, wing or shift of the nursing home).
- Problems that are likely to come up can be addressed on a smaller scale. Management and staff can see how something works. Then, they will feel more comfortable using consistent assignment in the whole building. See www.nhqualitycampaign.org.

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