

Help sheet no. 26

Staff communication strategies

Effective communication is critical to a well functioning organisation. To ensure effective communication consider these options:

- Regular staff meetings including different levels of staff to promote discussion, sharing information and ideas, reflecting on practice and jointly deciding on action.
- Try creating action statements during these meetings as an alternative to minutes. This way staff have new goals to achieve. These statements can also be provided to staff unable to attend the meeting so that they are kept informed. To ensure all staff have read them, you could get staff to sign them after reading.
- Place coloured posters with important messages around the facility.
- Try role swapping or role playing to break down barriers between staff and help staff understand limitations that others face.

One method that has promoted staff-esteem involved staff forming a circle and each telling one other staff member one thing they valued about working with them. If sensitively managed, this technique enables people to see that others value them and it also develops communication skills.

- Education programs that use current approaches to adult learning, for example experiential learning.
- Staff appraisal to encourage communication between staff and supervisors. Appraisal enables staff to determine how they are valued and how they can improve. It also increases supervisors' knowledge of staff satisfaction and ways to promote staff development.
- Satisfaction surveys for staff, residents and their families (see **help sheet 6**).
- 'Opportunity for improvement' forms allow staff to report things that could be improved. Management has responsibility to keep a record of these reports and to discuss possible solutions with staff and then act on the best approach.
- Use a whiteboard to communicate information to other staff - remember confidentiality issues.
- Regular newsletters.
- Foster communication between different work groups. For example, use menu cards and summary sheets to communicate what individual residents should be eating during the day. This information would be used by kitchen staff.

Newsletters

Finding someone who has the time to write newsletters may pose a problem. Despite this, they are an excellent method for communication between staff, residents and families. Consider the option of family members contributing to the compilation of a newsletter.

Ideas to include in a newsletter

- Message from the manager
- Occupational health and safety updates
- Birthdays
- Recipes
- Forthcoming events and meetings
- Fundraising and donations
- In-service information or 'best practice' tips
- Competitions, trivia questions and puzzles
- Welcoming new staff/residents
- Changes in policy and new procedures.

Listening

Listening is a critical part of communicating. Ask yourself:

- Do I really listen?
- Do I fully concentrate and block out other distractions?
- Do I make an effort to be interested in what others say?
- Do I try and put myself in other's shoes?
- Do I listen 'between the lines' to the meaning behind the words?
- Do I listen patiently or have a 'waiting to pounce' tendency?
- Is my mind made up on an answer before the other person has finished or do I listen with an open mind?
- Am I aware of non-verbal communication?
- Do I have time and do I appear hurried?
- Do I treat what is shared with me as privileged information?

Handover

Handover time is an important communication opportunity that allows staff to improve resident care. It is vital that staff all have the same goals for handover time. Goals need to be discussed. It is ideal to have a staff meeting to discuss what information is to be shared during handover. Sometimes information about what happened during the previous shift is not pertinent to staff during the following shift. What really needs to be shared? Use communication books to record notes so that staff in following shifts can refer back to them.

The importance of using handover effectively was demonstrated during a staff discussion group. The morning staff member stated she regularly supervised Mr D walking to the shower. The afternoon staff member said in surprise, "I didn't know

he could walk!" As a result she had never given him the opportunity to walk during the afternoon.

Thank you to Catherine Barrett, Melbourne Extended Care and Rehabilitation Service, for her input into this help sheet.

Source

Adapted from material obtained through a HACC Certificate IV Course held at Barton Institute of TAFE, 1998.