The Pendine Pathways Project in the independent sector


Summary

Recruitment and retention of staff, and the drive to provide quality care are challenges currently faced by nursing and residential homes in the independent sector. This article describes an innovative approach to tackling these issues. Under a teaching company scheme, a partnership was formed between the Pendine Park Nursing Home and the Centre for Learning Development to develop care and career pathways that are specific to the independent sector.

The national shortage of nurses and a dynamic job market are leading to recruitment and retention problems involving nursing and caring staff in the independent sector. The independent sector is increasingly relied on to provide continuing health and social care for some of the country’s most dependent and vulnerable citizens. Because of this the roles of nurses and healthcare assistants (carers) have expanded and staff require greater knowledge and expertise to meet the needs of more complex and demanding client groups. In their latest market survey of the independent sector, Laing and Buisson (2000) stated that: ‘...controlling staff costs and quality will become the key challenges for care home operators.’

Increasing economic pressures within a highly charged changing political scene are affecting the ability of many establishments to maintain the high-quality service expected by purchasers and consumers. Regulations on working time and the national minimum wage have been introduced at a time when fee increases for the 75 per cent of clients who are state funded have not risen in line with inflation. New standards introduced as a result of the Care Standards Act 2000 (DoH 2001) might mean that many smaller, rural homes have to close. While larger establishments can meet the environmental standards required by the Act (Laing and Buisson 2000), they too might face difficulties in meeting the levels of qualified staff recommended in these standards because of the continuous recruitment and retention pressures experienced by the independent sector.

One large family-owned establishment in North Wales (Pendine Park Nursing Homes, Pendine) wanted to attract, develop and retain a skilled and motivated workforce that could provide quality, evidence-based care. The owners realised that a more strategic, long-term plan was needed. To achieve this, a partnership was formed between Pendine and the Centre for Learning Development (CLD), under a teaching company scheme (TCS). The scheme is part of the Teaching Company Directorate, a government agency set up in 1973 to bring innovation to industry through the transfer of technology from university to industry (DTI 1999). The project is a first for TCS and was launched last year by Alan Pugh, Welsh Assembly Member for health and social care.

Two graduates (known as associates) receiving academic and company support are working on a two-year research-based project within the nursing homes. The two main aims of the project are the development of care and career pathways that are specific to the independent sector.

Project aims

Care pathways Pendine, like other organisations within the independent sector, has had to increase its number of beds to generate extra income in response to financial pressures. Following this expansion, the level of client dependency and the number of complex medical cases have increased. Current methods of planning care can lead to inconsistencies, poor use of resources and varying quality outcomes. The adoption of care pathways could provide an alternative that will promote evidence-based practice, incorporate efficient use of resources, combine the efforts of all who contribute to the care and include local protocols and guidelines within the company.

A review of the literature indicates that care
pathways have not been introduced in independent sector nursing homes. However, they have been developed in the management of pressure sores, continence, nutrition and palliative care (Currie 1999). These are priority areas of care within nursing and residential homes, which highlights the potential for the use of care pathways from established NHS settings in the independent sector.

**Career pathways**

The aim of this part of the project is the formulation of continuing professional development (CPD) programmes and the identification of a career pathway that is specific to registered nurses and carers in the independent sector. Promoting and recognising the challenging and varied roles within continuing care will enhance the profile of individuals who work within this sector and will present a more attractive image of the sector to potential employees and to the public in general. Ultimately, the aim is to positively influence the recruitment and retention of staff.

**Discussion**

The project seeks to address some of the current issues facing nursing and residential homes. The success of the project will be determined by Pendine in terms of the level of recruitment and retention, the quality standard of health and social care provision, use of resources, and reduced costs. The company aims to offer excellent care provided by knowledgeable, skilled, organised and motivated nurses and carers to clients and purchasers. The planned development of education and training based on research outcomes will eventually have an on-line format. The government and the National Assembly for Wales have both made pledges to develop partnerships with the independent sector and use it in a more strategic and structured manner. With this in mind, the problems facing the independent sector must be addressed and it is envisaged that benefits gained through the Pendine project might serve the independent sector as a whole.

The introduction of innovative practice and the provision of complex and demanding care through a loyal and caring workforce will enhance the profile of the independent sector.

**REFERENCES**


