

A PERSISTENT ISSUE: HIGH TURNOVER RATES
IN NURSING HOMES

by

Ariel Pye

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THESIS/PROJECT APPROVED by

Thesis/Project Instructor/Supervisor

Date

MHCA Executive Director

Date

Dean of the College of Health Sciences.

Date

Abstract

An analysis of current literature was conducted to better understand why nursing staff turnover remains high in the nursing home setting and the factors causing these high rates. Factors include wages below federal poverty levels for direct care workers, lack of benefits, and poor employee satisfaction and decreased emphasis on employee wellness. With this analysis, the severity of the effects of turnover and the impact on the healthcare system are discussed. An analysis of current strategies being implemented to improve high turnover rates, as well as how the nursing home care sector fairs currently, has also been discussed. Suggestions of potential policies to change the current state of the nursing home sector is critical in retaining and attracting potential long term care nursing staff in nursing homes.

Keywords: long term care, turnover, high turnover rates, nursing home, nursing staff, direct care workers, healthcare

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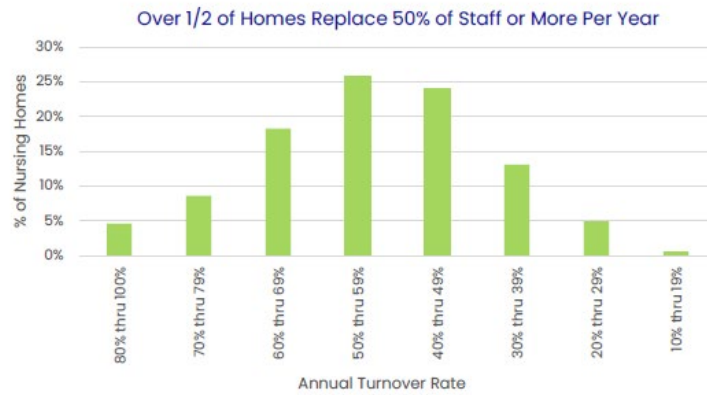


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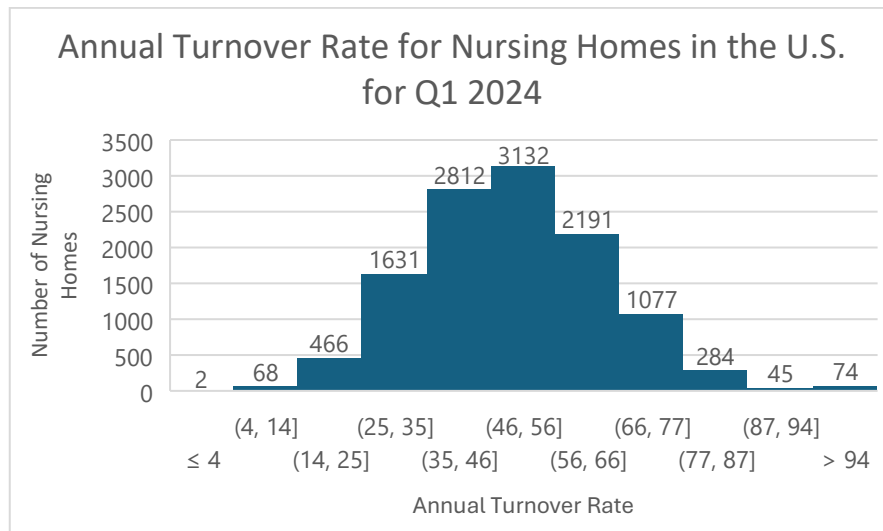


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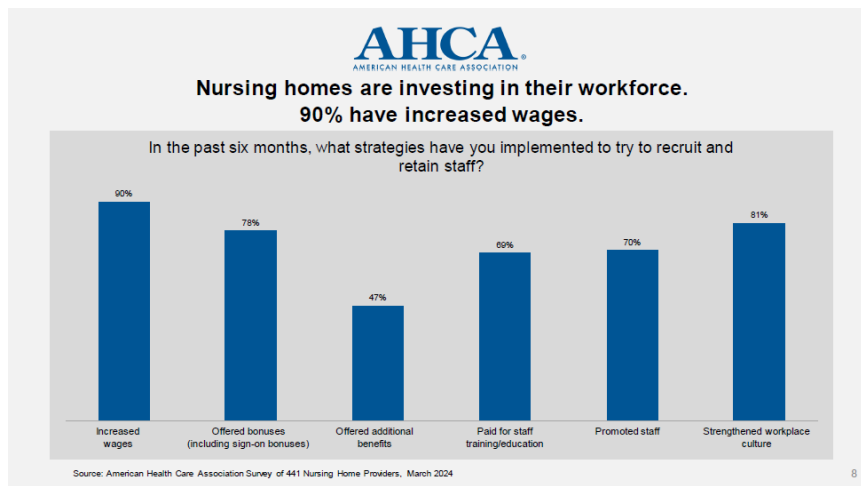


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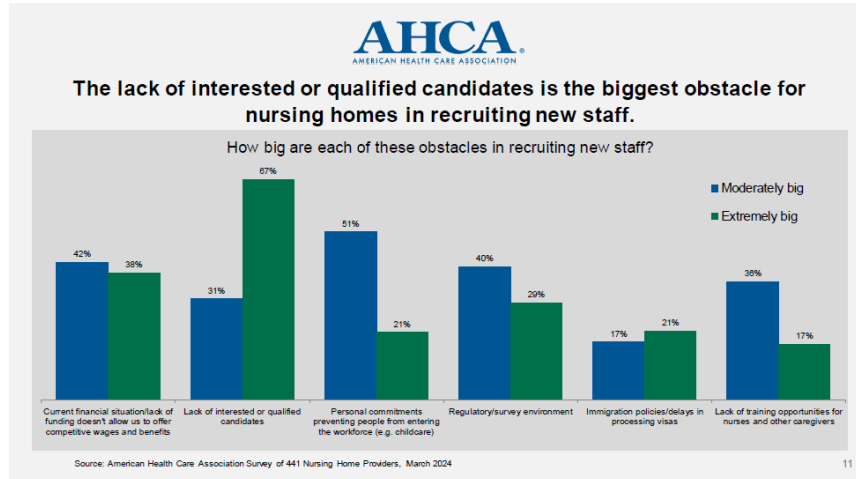


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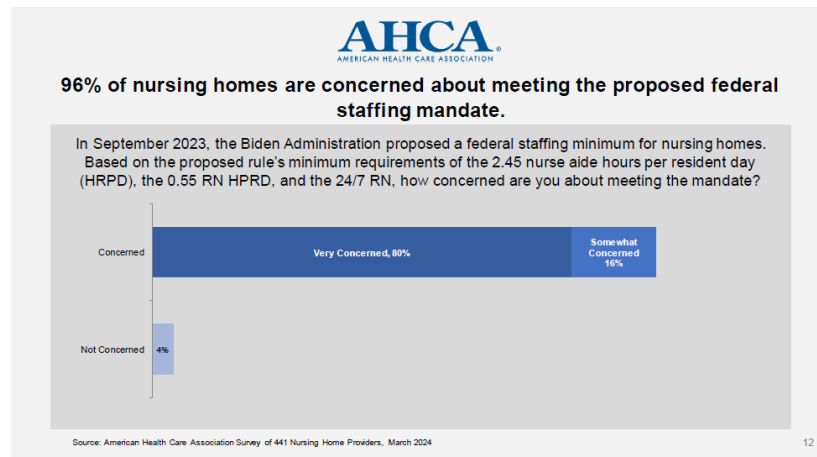


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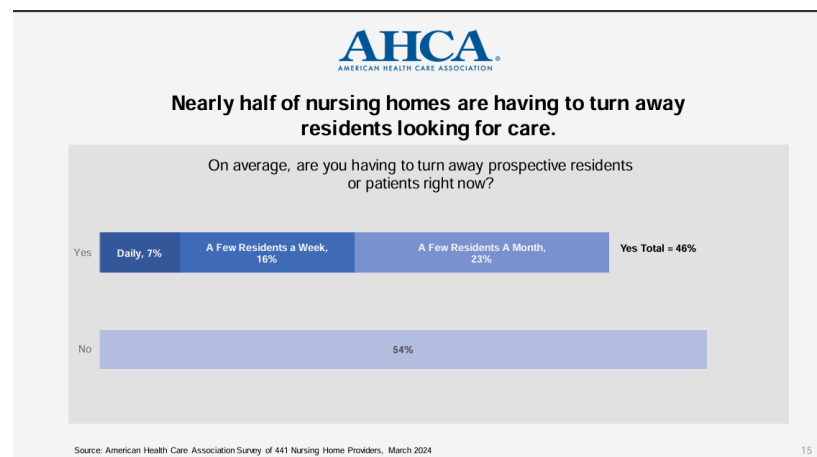


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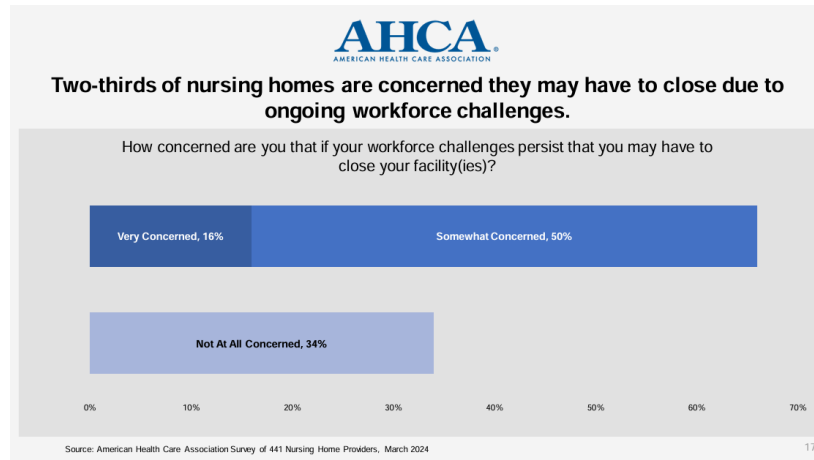


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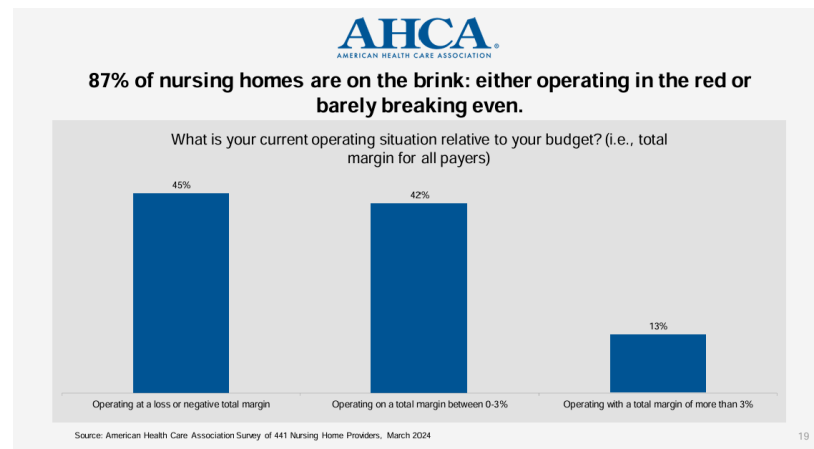


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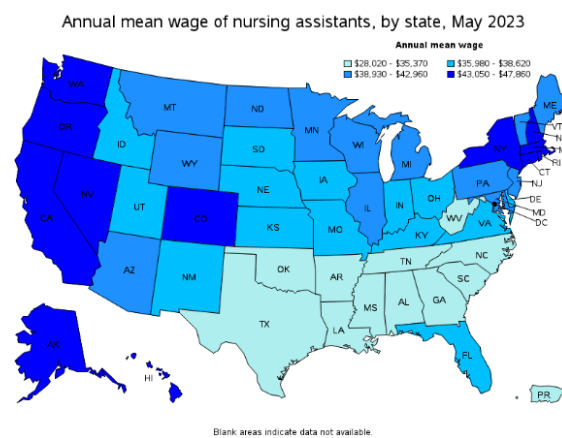


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Introduction

Turnover poses many challenges for any industry. In healthcare, it not only impacts the healthcare system financially, but it also negatively impacts the existing workforce, and the quality of care delivered to patients. Long term care facilities are persistently experiencing turnover rates well over average. As reported by CMS (2024), annual turnover rates among nursing staff in nursing homes lie regularly between the 40-60% range. The National Consumer Voice for Long Term Care Quality conducted a study in July 2022 of 15,178 nursing homes in the U.S. who had provided their turnover data. Of those facilities surveyed, 50% of nursing homes had reported annual turnover rates between 40-50% and more than 30% of the nursing homes reported experiencing turnover rates over 60% (The National Consumer Voice for Long-Term Quality Care, 2022). The healthcare system must ensure policies and procedures are applied to better support the existing long term care (LTC) workforce and to attract the future workforce for long term care facilities. The improvement of these policies and procedures for improved turnover involves understanding the various factors that increase the chance of turnover, the impact of turnover, and understanding the current conditions of the nursing home sector in healthcare.

The long-term care sector of healthcare is increasing as the population continues to live longer. Currently, the global life expectancy is 73.33 years, but it is set to increase to 78.1 years by 2050 (Institute for Health Metric and Evaluation, 2024). Due to the increase in the aging population and the population living longer, the demand for LTC services and the workforce to support these services increases. With increased age, the prevalence of chronic conditions, multiple chronic conditions, accidents and injuries, and the natural decline in the ability to complete the daily activities of living, increase the need for long term care (Adams, 2017).

Sustaining a long-term care workforce for the future is crucial for the healthcare system. Though demand for workers is high in this sector, it has been observed that even with increased wages and benefits, nursing homes and long-term care facilities are continuing to struggle with high turnover rates. This issue causes researchers to look further into organizational structure and management, schedules and attendance policies, employee wellness and support, benefits, staffing ratios, and increased transparency. Understanding the several factors contributing to turnover in long term care as well as the underlying issues in the healthcare system will aid in further decreasing turnover rates of LTC workers.

Situational Review

This project takes an integrative research approach analyzing evidence from articles and reports to further support the idea of the severity of high turnover rates in nursing homes in the United States. Nursing home facilities are characterized by lower wages compared to other areas of the healthcare system, high stress and workloads, burnout, physical and emotional strain, lack of appreciation and job satisfaction, inconsistent scheduling and staffing, low funding, and minimal resources. These factors contribute to high turnover rates. Direct care workers (DCWs), and registered nurses in long term care facilities not only treat patients for their chronic conditions, but also aid in the daily activities of living which requires constant physical labor and around the clock care. With a shortage of workers, the workload only intensifies further burdening existing staff and residents. The high turnover rates directly impact the existing LTC workforce and results in a lower quality of care to patients.

Problem Statement

Due to the slight change in the rates of turnover over the years, it can be determined nursing homes have become accustomed to high turnover rates. With minimal changes in turnover rates and the continual rise in the elderly population, this project aims to better understand specific factors related to high turnover in nursing homes, the current state of retention strategies implemented to decrease turnover in the LTC sector, and the nursing homes' response. There is a concern with a shortage of staff and the ability to attract and retain employees in LTC. Owing to an ever increasing and aging population, nursing homes are negatively impacted. With high turnover rates nationally across LTC facilities, the importance of retaining nurses and direct care workers in long term care facilities is necessary to sustain a workforce to address the needs of the population. Not only should facilities aim to retain their staff, but also aim to attract potential nursing staff.

Direct care workers (DCWs) often get paid wages at or near federal poverty level (FPL). DCWs are those who provide direct personal care. LTC services are for the elderly and/or the disabled who need help day to day. Examples of direct care workers are certified nursing assistants (CNAs), other nurse aides, personal care aides, and home health aides. Approximately 45% of DCWs lived below 200% of the federal poverty level in 2021 with the median pay for nursing assistants being \$30,830 (Khavjou et al., 2023). Currently, a wage gap exists between entry level healthcare workers (DCWs) and other entry level jobs outside of healthcare. It has been found that direct care workers have some of the lowest entry level wages which can cause them to leave the healthcare industry more frequently for other industries with similar pay but better hours and benefits such as food service, retail, and hospitality (Khavjou et al., 2023).

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023), nursing assistants alone made a median wage of \$38,130 a year and orderlies, such as patient care techs and transporters, made a

median wage of \$36,830 annually. Though wages have increased since 2021, direct care workers are still grossly underpaid for work. The wages are not livable, especially for those with families. Considering the direct hand nursing staff has on the elderly and long-term care populations' wellbeing and health, this issue must be addressed.

The severity of high turnover and the overall healthcare workforce shortage was amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic had worsened the healthcare workforce shortage across all disciplines, but the LTC sector has yet to recover. Nursing homes across the country had experienced infection rates as high as 75% in more than one thousand nursing homes in both residents and staff during the pandemic (National Healthcare Quality and Disparities Report, 2023). The long-term care sector is one of the few sectors who has yet to return to pre-COVID employment rates, and it is still struggling to decrease its turnover rates. The long term care sector is not projected to reach pre-COVID employment rates until 2027 (AHCA, 2023).

Without effective strategies to decrease turnover and improve nurse retention in LTC, more nursing homes will begin turning away LTC patients, worsening the health of the aging population and putting them at greater risk of accidents, injuries, and death. Turnover in nursing homes has been found to directly affect the quality of care and health outcomes (Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2022). Specifically, RN turnover seems to have the greatest impact on quality, this effect can be due to their core responsibility of coordinating and managing care. In one study conducted by Shin (2019), it further proved that with decreased rates of RN turnover, residents were less susceptible to falls, incontinence, and tube feedings. Not addressing the issue of turnover will continue to burden the existing nursing staff leading to increased rates of burnout and increased health issues for residents. Prior strategies such as increasing wages,

improving the availability of benefits to workers, and increasing access to educational and growth opportunities have been understood as some main factors to turnover in LTC facilities, but current data rejects those as major factors. Through this project, factors causing high rates of turnover, as well as the effectiveness of the strategies used to improve turnover rates to better understand the current circumstances will be analyzed.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to understand the severity of high turnover in nursing homes. There is a need for a policy shift. The issue of a nursing shortage and an increase in the elderly population has long been predicted by researchers for decades, and the time to act is now. As the baby boomer generation will all be age 65 years or older by 2030, six years from now, the strain on the healthcare workforce will increase (U.S. Census Bureau, 2024). Without effective strategies and policy changes, the issue will continue to worsen and negatively impact the existing healthcare workforce, and the population it serves. Retaining long term care workers and understanding their needs are vital to improve health outcomes and increase the LTC workforce. Understanding if current strategies such as increasing wages and increasing access to employee provided benefits are effective in decreasing turnover help healthcare stakeholders, such as administrators and policy makers, ensure they are taking action that is effective. Without properly addressing these issues, the turnover rate will continue to remain high, further impacting the quality of care to patients, and the workload on current long term care workers. Through this analysis, the study should provide information to the correlation between turnover and wages, benefits, schedules, workloads, and employee wellness support.

Significance

This research aims to alert healthcare workers inside and outside of the LTC sector, potential LTC nursing staff, healthcare administrators, insurance companies, and policymakers of the current condition of the ongoing challenges in the long-term care sector specifically. Though there is an overall workforce nursing shortage in the healthcare system, the long-term care sector has been in dire need of restructuring. Strategies that make the work more rewarding and show the value nursing staff brings to the success of the organization may aid in LTC facilities in maintaining a stable workforce. Healthcare administrators, insurance companies, policy makers, and the nursing staff themselves are vital in addressing high turnover in nursing home solutions.

Health care administrators may use this study to better understand nursing home facility challenges in maintaining a workforce and aid in the development of better recruitment and retaining strategies, as well as promote the extreme need for change when it comes to policies and regulations hyper fixated on the needs of the existing workforce to improve employee retention and reduce turnover. Administrators should be aware of these challenges and implement changes that focus on the needs of the population served, as well as the needs of their employees.

Insurance companies are another component addressing turnover rates in nursing homes in the sense that they are the officials responsible for reimbursing providers for their services. They should understand that current strategies are not working, and that benefit and wage increases can only do so much. Insurance companies need to be held responsible to ensure the coverage they offer allows LTC patients receive all the services pertaining to their care that does not empty their bank accounts. In ensuring reimbursement rates are equal to the cost of delivering care is important for a facility to sustain their expenses. Not only is access and

affordability important in improving the overall health of the population, but it also helps ease the financial burden and stressors related to receiving LTC care services.

Healthcare policy makers have a duty to fulfill the needs of the population in all aspects. Policymakers can add value to long term care and reframe the current pay structures and policies related to workloads and staffing to prioritize employee wellness for patient wellness. Nursing staff have a responsibility to bring up issues and concerns relevant to their quality of work. If they are not able to properly work to provide optimal care, they should ensure they discuss these matters with administrators and other stakeholders. The workforce can also be valuable in providing information on weak areas within the facility and potential solutions to address those issues.

Capstone Research Questions

This capstone project considers the following questions:

Q1: How does pay at or below the federal poverty level contribute to high turnover rates (50% average turnover) in long term care facilities?

Q2: Are long term care facilities increasing wages and benefits to improve turnover?

Q3: How do high rates of turnover in nursing homes affect access to care?

Hypothesis

By making the long-term care sector more appealing through implementing more flexible schedules, employee wellness-based attendance policies and culture, competitive pay and benefits, and equally valuing long term care workers will aid in retaining staff to improve the turnover rate in nursing homes and residents' access to quality long term care services.

Background

Nursing homes provide long term health care services for the elderly and/or disabled. The residents typically can no longer care for themselves alone and need 24-hour monitoring and assistance. Patients in long term facilities, such as nursing homes, pay for services through Medicaid and Medicare, private insurance or out of pocket. Medicaid is the largest of the payer mix, accounting for 62% of nursing home residents as of July 2023 (Chidabaram & Burns, 2023). Staff typically consists of direct care workers: registered nurses (RNs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), certified nursing assistants (CNAs), and occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech therapists and other supporting and administrative staff.

For this project, the focus will be on the direct care workers, the nursing staff. RNs, LPNs, and CNAs take on much of the care for residents daily. RNs oversee patient care. They make up care plans, monitor patients, manage patient medications, and ensure they are getting the care they need to maintain their health and well-being. LPNs administer primary care to the patients, which includes giving medications, taking vitals, inserting catheters, and dressing wounds, as well as daily care (Cleveland Clinic Medical, 2022). CNAs assist in most of the activities of daily living (ADL) such as bathing, dressing, eating, moving and toileting, as well as basic patient care, patient comfort, and room maintenance. CNAs in nursing homes also aid in moving patients, which can be physically tasking. RNs oversee all other nursing staff and ensure the patient is being care for properly.

With majority of payers having Medicaid, it is up to the legislators to provide effective policy changes to further improve this issue. CMS is gathering information to better address this issue by requiring nursing homes to report employee turnover and tenure through the Payroll

Based Journal (PBJ) in which weekend staffing, nursing staff turnover, RN turnover, and hours worked. To further improve transparency and understand turnover there is also the CMS Care Compare website. This information allows for more transparency for potential patients, nursing staff, and policy makers. It can also help provide data to further understand how nursing homes with higher turnover and nursing homes with lower turnover rates compare and aid patients and their families in choosing the best quality facility near them. Due to the drastic effect turnover has on quality, reporting staffing levels is crucial in understanding the relationship between quality and turnover. To advance information on the quality of care, CMS makes nursing home staffing data available. Along with CMS requiring staffing levels to be reported, the Biden Administration has also responded to the high turnover rates by implementing new nursing staff standards and reporting procedures.

Literature Review

High turnover rates are a persistent issue in the nursing home sector of the healthcare industry. High turnover rates in nursing homes greatly impact the healthcare system and can potentially impact other facilities such as hospitals as nursing homes begin to struggle with staffing their facility and turning away patients. Understanding the current policies to address this issue, the current state of the LTC sector and the factors that affect turnover, the impact of turnover on the overall healthcare system, its stakeholders, and readdressing strategies to improve turnover rates in nursing homes will be discussed. Without properly understanding these components that make up the LTC industry, proper solutions cannot be implemented.

Recent Policies to Address the LTC Sector's Current State

Most recently there have been new policies to address the current state of the nursing home and long-term care sector to improve care for residents and support the direct care workers. The Biden-Harris Administration in conjunction with The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and CMS have made strides towards improving the long-term care sector. In 2023, the Minimum Staffing Standards for Long-Term Care (LTC) Facilities and Medicaid Institutional Payment Transparency Reporting was presented. Through the minimum staffing standards final rule for nursing homes, a national minimum staffing requirement was provided for nursing homes as staffing levels directly affect the quality of care services delivered. The new standards call for a minimum of 3.48 hours of direct nursing care for each resident daily, with 0.55 coming from RNs, and 2.45 of care provided by nurse aides, and any other nursing staff taking up for the left over 0.48 hours (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2024). Not only does the new rule require new minimum hours per resident each day, but the new rule also requires a 24/7 RN to provide direct care (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2024). As of 2024, only around 19% met the new staffing standards (Chidabaram et al., 2024). Facilities will be pushed to hire more staff to sustain the needs of the residents and meet the standards.

With these new standards, it will be all the more vital to ensure that benefits outweigh the cons to ensure the retainment and recruitment of nursing staff for long term care facilities. The Medicaid Institutional Payment Transparency rule aims to be more transparent with how Medicaid payments are used in facilities. It requires states to report the percent of Medicaid payments that go to the direct care worker and employee pay (CMS, 2024). Through these rules and the mandatory reporting on quality and staffing levels, the public is allowed more information to understand the state of facilities around them and to help them make the most informed decision when looking for an LTC facility that is right for them.

Factors

High rates of turnover are a major issue in the healthcare system. As LTC facilities continue to experience turnover, it can lead facilities to reduce admissions, negatively impact the quality and safety of care, decrease positive health outcomes, decrease compliance, increase costs, decrease revenue, impact resident attitudes and health, and negatively impact employee wellness and satisfaction. Understanding the several factors that contribute to high turnover, is crucial to finding solutions that aim to decrease turnover rates in nursing homes.

Employee turnover is the number or percentage of people who leave their place of work over a given period, in this case, annually. The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) requires nursing homes to report on staffing levels to track staff turnover that is used in the Nursing Home Five Star Quality Rating System (American Health Care Association, 2024). Most recently, CMS changed what counts as turnover; it is to be an absence of a staff member for 60 days or more, excluding those who are gone for 90 days due to maternity or parental leave (American Health Care Association, 2024). Nursing staff may leave their place of work for a variety of organizational reasons and personal reasons, such as poor management, lack of career advancement, work life balance, low wages, a lack of childcare, lack of transportation, and even retirement.

Wages & Benefits

Wages and benefits are a key factor in LTC facilities with higher staff turnover rates. Total compensation offered to employees can demonstrate how much an employer values their employees' contribution to ensuring the facility meets its goals and runs smoothly. It can demonstrate how much administrators and leaders recognize the contributions made from the

nursing staff in the overall success of the organization. Generally, nursing staff in hospitals receive higher pay and better access to benefits due to the more diverse patient population and job responsibilities, and a more flexible budget.

Direct care workers receive lower pay in nursing homes than in hospitals and other similar entry level jobs in other industries. The median wage of an RN in 2023 in a hospital was \$88,430, whereas in nursing/residential care facilities it was \$79,280 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). For nursing assistants, the wages between the hospital and the nursing and assisted living facilities barely differed being \$38,920 and \$37,230-37,780 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). The justification behind lower wages, specifically for the CNAs, is due to less education requirements and lower responsibility.

CNAs primarily take care of the ADLs for residents, building relationships with them and ensuring their comfortability. It was shown in an issue brief by the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) that direct care workers' wages had an average difference of \$3.15 per hour in comparison to other entry level jobs in the food or retail industries (Kavjou et al., 2023). Though the CNA role does require less education, the value of the job does not diminish, as the impact of their absence is noticed with lower positive health outcomes due to less time being spent with the resident. Since CNAs provide a majority of the care, residents may be at higher risk of injury, infection, or neglect. CNAs and other nursing aides are vital in proper care to residents. They are typically the first to notice changes in residents. Due to the physical labor of the job, many CNAs find the wages are not corresponding with the demands of the job. For that reason, many leave the direct care job for another, less labor-intensive job.

When it came to benefits, 14% of direct care workers did not have health insurance whereas 53% lacked access to employer provided insurance (Connacher, 2023). Due to the lower funding and tight budgets associated with nursing homes, facility operations and resources take priority over employee wages. Since most nursing home workers are part time or they have inconsistent hours, many do not qualify for benefits. Regulations should be put in place to reframe the qualifications for insurance and if that is not the case, wages should compensate for the lack of benefits like employee provided insurance. Regulations should also be used to better control and protect the part time workforce in this industry.

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is where an individual feels valued and satisfied in their work. The LTC facility environment has long been affected by the stressors of a shortage of staff. Minimal staffing means patient needs are not being met 100% of the time. Burnout, high workload and physically and emotionally intensive work are other factors related to turnover. Understanding the challenges of the workplace can aid health administrators in implementing more effective workplace procedures to prevent turnover.

Nursing assistants experience some of the highest rates of work-related injuries (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). Heavy lifting and strain are two of the major injuries that occur, not to mention potential patient attacks. In one study, it was found that 44% of injuries were due to lifting while more than half of the injuries were due to overexertion (Lapane et al., 2016). Facilities should ensure nurses have all the equipment necessary to reduce the risk of injury to workers. On top of the physical labor of the job, nursing staff in LTC facilities can regularly experience violent behavior from the residents. Resident aggression can lead to staff

burnout, due to the strain and emotional stress it can cause to nursing staff (Yan et al., 2024). Ensuring nursing staff has the proper resources and training to avoid workplace injury is crucial to the success of the worker, improving job satisfaction.

Managerial and peer support and the work environment are important in job satisfaction. Leadership and management lay the foundation of the workplace culture. It was founded that staff want to feel appreciated, heard, and respected, which improves work satisfaction and maximizes productivity (Krein et al., 2022). When health administrators take the time to ensure their employees are content and feel a part of the organization's success, they are more likely to remain with their place of work. As job satisfaction is maintained, nursing homes may exhibit a decreased rate of turnover, and an overall increase in the quality of care provided to patients.

Burnout

Burnout is where an individual experiences high rates of stress at the workplace both physically and emotionally that can contribute to individuals wanting to leave their place of work. Harrad and Sulla (2018) describe burnout in three parts, increased emotional exhaustion, increased depersonalization, and decreased personal achievement. Burnout is a major factor in nursing homes especially due to the high rates of turnover mainly because existing staff must take on more work on top of their own. Increased rates of burnout in nursing staff have been linked to poorer health outcomes for patients (Harrad & Sulla, 2018). Burnout can also include physical exhaustion, a lack of energy, depression, anxiety, and distress (Haj et al., 2023). Nursing staff with residents with dementia are at higher risk of burnout due to the challenging issues that come with dementia patients such as confusion and sometimes violent behaviors (Haj et al., 2023).

COVID-19 had amplified many ongoing issues, and burnout was one of them. Since the pandemic, healthcare leaders and existing healthcare professionals have become more vocal about workplace stress, burnout, and workload and its effect on the individual and work performance. Burnout has been considered a major threat to healthcare professionals all through the healthcare system and as the population continues to grow at a faster rate than healthcare professionals that are coming into the healthcare system, it will continue to be a major issue affecting turnover.

Training and Support

Due to nursing homes needing workers quickly, training is often rushed or lacking, specifically for CNAs and other nursing aids, to which the new healthcare worker ends up not being fully prepared to execute their duty properly. The current federal CNA requirements in 75 hours, with 16 hours of supervised practical training that involves work in a lab or other setting (Long Term Care Community Coalition, 2023). This training covers basic nursing skills, personal care skills, mental health and social service needs, care of cognitively impair residents, basic restorative services, and resident rights (Long Term Care Community Coalition, 2023). Ensuring that staff is equipped to work in the LTC setting is crucial to retaining employees. When new direct care workers are not fully trained, they may fail in fulfilling their responsibilities, affecting the quality of care and putting residents at risk of injuries and sickness (Scales, 2020). During the pandemic, nursing staff had become crucial in hindering the spread infection, with this newfound role in infection control, ensuring there are sufficient standards in place to protect future and current patients and healthcare professionals. Through proper training, direct care workers will also feel more empowered knowing they understand their practice to its full extent.

Work Environment

Nursing home staff, particularly nursing assistants and aides, also have high rates of workplace injuries. Nursing assistants have one of the highest rates of workplace injuries (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). Their injury rates are high due to the physical demands of their work mostly when moving and lifting patients. Nursing assistants regularly aid residents in dressing, toileting, and lifting and turning their patients. Over time, these movements wear on the body, and with age, the risk of injury increases. Health administrators should ensure that nursing staff is not overworking themselves and that they have the proper equipment and resources to reduce the risk of workplace injuries. Ensuring employees understand proper procedures in moving patients and other objects should also be considered. Along with proper training for a safe work environment, administrators should also foster an open line of communication for staff. This creates an environment surrounded by respect, collaboration, and positivity. Due to the long hours and high stress and workloads, employees have more difficulty in their place of work. Administrators have a responsibility to reduce these elements of a poor work environment for the wellbeing and safety of their employees.

The Impact of High Turnover on Nursing Homes

Turnover impacts the quality of care delivered to patients, the patient's wellbeing, the wellbeing of the direct care workers, the facilities, and the healthcare system. With increased rates of turnover, the prevalence of positive health outcomes decreases. Nursing staff becomes overwhelmed by higher workloads, furthering the chance of burnout and dissatisfaction. Facilities' reputations may be affected negatively if turnover remains constant, and the financial state of the facility will decrease. The healthcare system as a whole suffers with the strain and it

falls directly on the existing workforce. The population's overall health can decline. Turnover may be an issue that will take decades to improve, but understanding the current factors, and the effectiveness of current strategies is the first step in improving turnover rates in nursing homes.

Effect on Quality

The impact of high turnover has been directly linked to negatively impact quality. Patient safety is a major component of quality. It encompasses all aspects of care, safety, effectiveness, patient centeredness, timeliness, efficiency and equitability (World Health Organization, 2020). Minimizing errors and harm are key components to quality care to patients. High rates of turnover in nursing homes have been linked to lower quality ratings and decreased health outcomes (Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2022). RN turnover specifically, directly effects resident safety and outcomes.

As nursing staff leaves a facility, the workload is transferred to existing staff which overloads them and causes little to no time spent with patients. Not only does nursing staff turnover disrupt existing staff, but it disrupts the relationship between the resident and the former nurse. It will take time for another nurse to build the trust of the resident. Thus, the continuity of care is affected. It was observed that of those facilities with higher turnover rates also experienced an increase in resident abuse and overall lower ratings.

For nursing homes with a rate between 50% to 59% there was a 1.5 times higher chance of abuse than nursing homes with a turnover rate between 30%-39% (Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2022). This is mostly due to the lack of staff able to address each and every patient's needs. As workloads increase, quality is affected as time spent with each patient decreases. Due to a shortage of staff, it makes it difficult for existing staff to maintain

compliance while caring for the patient. As far as the ratings are concerned, nursing homes with high turnover also had lower overall five-star ratings compared to those with low turnover (Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2022).

Increased nursing turnover rates also negatively impacted health inspection performance with the highest number of citations dealing with the quality of care (Shen et al., 2023). When it comes to health inspection citations there are three types, no harm, potential harm, and immediate jeopardy. The number of potential harm citations increased as nursing turnover rates increased (Shen et al., 2023). This further confirms the impact nursing staff directly has on the performance of the nursing home facility and its residents.

Nursing Home Current Strategies to Reduce Turnover

Nursing homes have persistently battled with high turnover rates, impacting delivery of care to patients and the sustainability of the LTC workforce. Despite increasing wages and providing more education and growth opportunities to employees, the sector is continuing to experience turnover. In a survey conducted by the American Health Care Association in March 2024, 441 nursing homes were surveyed on how they dealt with labor shortages. Of those nursing homes, 99% of nursing home providers were hiring and seven out of ten of them were still lower than pre-COVID staffing levels (AHCA, 2024). This goes on to confirm that nursing homes are constantly battling with staffing their facilities to properly care for their patients. Of those surveyed, 90% of the facilities had increased wages, 78% have offered bonuses, 47% offered additional benefits, 69% have paid for training and education, 70% promoted staff, and 81% improved workplace culture (AHCA,2024). All these factors were previously proven to be main drivers for turnover in long term care. Majority of nursing homes in the U.S. have already

implemented strategies to decrease turnover and improve staffing levels yet, the challenge persists. Long term care facilities are increasing wages and benefits but that does not seem to be enough to retain workers. Other areas to pursue for improvements are job satisfaction and overall attraction to the job.

A workforce shortage provides a ripple effect. In the AHCA survey previously mentioned, nursing homes provided valuable insight on how labor shortages have been addressed for improved recruitment and retainment. Forty-six percent of those surveyed had stated they were limiting admissions due to staff shortages while 97% asked staff to work overtime (AHCA, 2024). If admissions to LTC facilities are being limited, it impacts the financial sustainability of the facility, and it reduces the access to care. With a limit on access to care, potential LTC patients will end up filling up hospital beds. Nursing homes aid in reducing outpatient care and hospitalizations (Atramont et al., 2017). Through disease management, constant monitoring and prevention, most hospitalizations are avoided. Annually, about three million older people end up in the emergency department due to a fall (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). Of those falls, 1 in 10 results in the individual to restrict their activities or seek extra medical attention, thus the need for LTC services (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024).

Strategies to Reduce Turnover

Current strategies to reduce turnover are to address the factors. Increasing wages and the prevalence of employer insurance, bonuses, paying for training, and aiding in educational support have all been used to ensure staff are properly trained and valued.

Due to the burnout, increased workload, and employee satisfaction issues, employers should also investigate strategies that improve nursing staff wellbeing. This can be in the form of creating a more positive work environment that fosters teamwork, collaboration, communication, and support. Discussing issues with nursing staff and getting involved with the decision-making process can help administrators understand exactly what is going on in the facility and provide an opportunity for improvement strategies to be implemented. When health administrators foster this type of environment workers are more likely to feel valued and supported in their place of work (American Nurses Association, 2024). Offering wellness workshops or programs for staff to attend focused on stress management or other wellness practices can show the nursing staff that management cares about their wellbeing.

Lastly, as previously stated, restructuring schedules to offer a better work life balance for nursing staff. The nursing home setting requires 24-hour care weekdays, and weekends. Health administrators should ensure that favoritism is nonexistent, and that staff scheduling is rotated fairly among all nursing staff. It should foster flexibility, so nurses can easily take time off when needed. With high turnover rates, this may be difficult to achieve, but offering time off without being penalized for it, can help the staff feel like they have control over how they work and take time off. This can help to improve job satisfaction and decrease burnout.

Strategies to reduce turnover are vital in maintaining a sustainable workforce for the future LTC population. There have been many strategies introduced to decrease turnover rates, such as increased wages, better benefits, such as insurance to workers, improved management and leadership competency, improved teamwork, professional development opportunities with training and education, flexible schedules, and employee wellness programs.

Research Methodology & Data Collection

This collection of data consists of quantitative, secondary data focused on the average rate of turnover in nursing homes in 2022 and in the first quarter of 2024, along with the statistics on the current conditions of nursing homes and how various strategies are being used to improve turnover. The data gives insight into how nursing homes are currently responding to workforce shortages. Data was gathered from the Long-Term Care Community Coalition (LTCCC). LTCCC gathers their data quarterly from The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) public data sets showing data on nursing home staffing levels, ratings, hours per resident per day and weekends, and turnover for staff. For the purpose of this project, only the nursing staff and RN staff turnover rates are being observed. Using Google as the online search engine, journal articles, reports, and data sets were collected. The statistical data to be used to answer the questions was gathered through secondary sources. This data came from a variety of national organizations such as the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, the National Consumer Voice, and LTCCC. The subjects of study are nursing homes throughout the United States. Data was gathered via the Payroll Based Journal (PBJ) website in which nursing homes report on various aspects of staffing within their facility.

Ethical Issues

With secondary data, this data does not include direct interaction with human subjects. The data gathered by AHCA involved surveys from nursing homes CMS certified nursing homes. For the National Consumer Voice source, data was collected through the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Nursing Home Care Compare website. The Quarter 1 2024 Payroll-Based Journal staffing data is provided by CMS, since CMS certified nursing

homes are required to report regularly on staffing data. Though the gathering of the preliminary data can involve the participation of individuals, none of the data provides personal or identifiable information that may violate privacy or harm the individuals involved. It can be assumed that all data gathered has been ethically sourced, as it is all available to the public. The only identifiable information provided by CMS PBJ data excel sheet is the name and state of the nursing home facility.

Results

There is an extensive amount of research on the high turnover rates of nursing staff in nursing homes. Research has shown several times, the severity of high turnover rates in nursing homes and its effect on quality, the existing workforce, and the impact on the healthcare system. According to the report by The National Consumer Voice for Quality Long-Term Care in which accounted for 12,494 nursing homes turnover data in the U.S., 50% of those facilities had annual turnover rates ranging from 40-60% (Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2022). The overall severity of the turnover rates in long term care seems to remain consistent. A 2022 report conducted by the National Consumer Voice was analyzed. National Consumer Voice gathered data via the Center for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) Care Compare website in which nursing homes report nursing staff that leave the job annually. According to the data, in 2022, nursing homes in the U.S had an average turnover rate of nursing staff of 52% (Figure 1.).

Though this data is from 2022, data was also analyzed for the first quarter of 2024 in a data set provided by Long Term Care Community Coalition (LTCCC). LTCCC provides nursing home staffing reports quarterly that focuses on nurse staff levels, non-nurse staff levels, turnover rates, weekend staff levels, and staff ratings for each state, CMS region, and nationally in the

U.S. (LTCCC, 2024). For this project, a histogram was created given the turnover rates data for quarter 1 of 2024 (Figure 2.). Figure 2 confirms that most nursing homes in quarter one of 2024 have a turnover rate between 40-60%. The results are consistent with the 2022 findings in the Consumer Voice report and have not seemed to have changed much (Figure 1).

To address research question 2, according to the AHCA report, 90% of nursing homes have increased wages and 47% have offered other benefits to improve their employment rate and retainment and 69% paid for training and education for their staff (Figure 3.). The results show that most nursing homes are improving wages and benefits to their employees and turnover remains high. Ninety-four percent of nursing homes stated that recruiting staff alone was exceedingly difficult (AHCA, 2024). Through this survey, it is interesting to note that benefits and wages were not the main driving factors causing high turnover and workforce shortages in nursing homes. Rather, nursing homes have experienced a lack of interest/qualified individuals (67% of the 441 nursing homes surveyed) in the field to be an extremely big factor with the nursing shortage whereas the lack of competitive wages and benefits accounted for 38% of nursing homes as an extremely big issue (Figure 4). Lack of interested or qualified candidates and personal commitments preventing individuals from entering the workforce, and then financial situations/lack of competitive wages and benefits were the top three obstacles in recruiting new staff (Figure 4). Although wages and benefits have been improved, there are still other factors such as a lack of interest in the field and barriers such as access to childcare that prevent nursing staff from improving the nursing shortage in long term care facilities.

To address the final research question, nursing homes are struggling to maintain open doors and revenue. 87% of facilities are operating at a loss or barely breaking even (Figure 8). 46% of the 441 nursing home providers surveyed had to reject patients due to the labor shortage

(Figure 6). With the increase in rejections of patients, new patient waitlists have also increased with 57% nursing homes affected (AHCA, 2024). The results show that most nursing homes fear for the future of their facility success with two-thirds concerned they may have to close their facilities (Figure 7). Nearly every nursing home struggles with sustaining their workforce, which can impede the proper access to care for patients. As turnover remains high, more patients will be turned away, and more facilities and unit will continue to shut down.

Discussion

Through these results, it shows the severity of the state of the nursing home sector, and how unprepared it is for the influx of baby boomers moving into the 65+ age and older. Even with all the baby boomers entering care, the population will continue to live longer and increase the need for long term care services. Majority of nursing homes are already experiencing the impact of high turnover rates on their workforce, their facilities, and their patients. With one of the newest issues being that there is a lack of interest in working in nursing homes, and the long-term care sector in general.

Healthcare leaders and nursing home stakeholders will need to implement strategies to attract healthcare professionals to their facilities. This could involve nursing homes getting involved with high schools in their area, offering tours and educational experiences, and helping future healthcare professionals get real insight into the benefit of working in long term care. In involving young aspiring healthcare professionals, they can help reshape the view the healthcare industry has on long term care. Healthcare stakeholders should hold transparent exit interviews to truly understand why nursing staff are leaving their facilities and base their retention strategies off that feedback. For instance, if there was prevalence of a toxic work environment or work

culture, the healthcare administrator and upper management can investigate quality improvement strategies related to improving culture in the facility. Regardless of the solution, it will take a great effort from the healthcare administrators, to senior leaders, policy makers, the nursing staff workforce, and the patients and families themselves to ensure changes are made to improve nursing home facilities to fulfill the needs of the nursing staff to reduce turnover rates.

Healthcare Administrator Role

Healthcare administrators play a powerful role in advocating for their facilities, their workforce, the performance of the facility, and their residents. Healthcare administrators engage in the day-to-day operations ensuring that processes run smoothly. They are the key stakeholders who can report to senior level executives about issues within their facilities and quality improvement processes. Increasing accountability and transparency may be a topic to bring up to upper-level management. It has been shown that for profit nursing homes have had issues meeting staffing minimums, which can increase turnover (Halifax & Harrington, 2022). Looking into how funds are allocated in for profit facilities may be a topic to explore for those with high turnover rates. More nursing home administrators should stress the value of their workforce and their contribution to the performance of the facility to ensure they are be compensated and cared for properly.

Policy Implications

The nursing home sector has had been known for tight financial budgets. Policies that reallocate finances towards support the workforce is a crucial part in ensuring the stability of the LTC workforce. Due to Medicaid being the top provider of coverage for residents, looking into increasing reimbursement rates to ensure rates cover the costs of providing care will aid in

supporting nursing staff and aid the healthcare facility in preventing the facility from turning away new patients and closing facilities down. Though Medicaid rates have steadily increased, rates are still low (LTCCC, 2021). Halifax & Harrington (2021), states that Medicaid funding alone will not sustain financial needs to maintain staff levels, but rather for-profit nursing home leaders should investigate reallocating funding to better support nursing staff. Implementing policies to increase reporting on the transparency of where revenue is being used and holding nursing homeowners accountable for the state of their facilities may offer better awareness to the workforce shortage issue on wages and valuing their staff.

Limitations

The limitations of this study consist of the complete use of secondary data and the interpretation of quantitative data. In interpreting this data there may be potential biases by the researcher. The use of quantitative data can also leave out beneficial qualitative, descriptive information related to the why behind turnover. The individual experiences or emotions that lead nursing staff to leave their work in long term care facilities, is a major part of understanding turnover. Turnover is a complex issue that occurs for a variety of reasons, and the use of quantitative data only provides a number and not necessarily the why behind nursing staff leaving long term care. Information related to these reasons may be beneficial in implementing effective retention strategies. The data used was gathered via surveys and nursing home reporting data off the CMS website. This research also has not included the rise in home health care and personal aides in decreased nursing rates in nursing homes. It also does not differentiate between turnover rates between for profit and non-profit nursing homes and how they compare.

Conclusion

Nursing homes face challenges daily due to the ongoing high turnover rates. Existing nursing staff is negatively impacted with increased work pressures and workloads, burnout, and dissatisfaction. In previous research, it was understood that turnover in nursing homes were caused by payment discrepancies and a poor work environment in comparison to other health care facilities and industries. Nursing staff in nursing homes get paid significantly less than of those who work in hospitals. Direct care workers, CNAs exclusively, are overlooked due to the lack of education and training they have. Many of them work multiple jobs, part time, with inconsistent hours, qualifying for little to no benefits.

Though, through the most recent report from AHCA (2024), a majority of nursing homes are doing everything they can to attract and retain staff such as improving benefits, increasing wages, offering to pay for education and training, and even improving the work environment. One of the major findings is that the LTC sector is facing the issue of attracting the interest of potential and qualified nursing staff. Strategies to regain an interest and make work in long term care facilities more appealing to potential candidates is crucial. Increasing an emphasis on a work life balance, possibly offering part time worker specific benefits or reframing the work schedules so part time workers can qualify for benefits is crucial in ensuring the employees are being properly cared for. The nursing home environment is already demanding and labor intensive as it is; adding more unnecessary stress regarding wages and benefits, should not be one of those issues.

Along with wages and benefits, access to care and care quality are affected. As more facilities fail to recruit and maintain nurse staff, more and more facilities will begin to close. This closes the door to new patients and prevents LTC potentials from receiving the services they need for a better quality of life. Poorer health outcomes of LTC patients will become more

common. Hospital beds will begin to be taken by LTC patients, further straining the healthcare system.

The LTC field is in dire need of restructuring to ensure sustainability. By disregarding the nursing staff's needs, nursing home stakeholders also disregard the needs of their population they serve. Applying incentives and policies to reduce the several factors of turnover regarding transparency, accountability, and employee wellbeing will aid in decreasing turnover rates in the nursing home sector. In valuing the nursing staff workforce and understanding why many are not interested in the LTC field, new strategies can be implemented to focus on better recruitment and retainment for better quality and access to LTC services.

Future Research

Future research on transparency and accountability on nursing home owners both for profit and not for profit facilities may aid in improving nursing home budgets that better sustain and attract high quality healthcare professionals. Understanding how revenue is allocated in the best and worst performing nursing homes can provide valuable insight. Another potential area of study can involve investigating the impact of nursing home outreach programs on attracting potential healthcare workers for long term care facilities.

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