



FAST FACTS: Consistent Assignment

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. This consumer fact sheet explains why it is important for residents to get the same caregivers most of the time.

What does consistent assignment mean?

Consistent assignment means that residents see the same caregivers (registered nurse, licensed practical nurse or certified nursing assistant) almost every time they are on duty. Many residents are more comfortable with caregivers who know and understand their personal preferences and needs. Consistent assignment is primary assignment.

What should you know about consistent assignment?

Consistent assignment is a key step in giving care that is centered on the resident. It builds strong relationships between residents and staff, which are central to better care.

A nursing home adopts consistent assignment to strengthen relationships between individual residents, their families, friends and the caregivers. Staff who take care of the same residents are happier in their jobs and tend to stay in their jobs.

How does consistent assignment benefit residents?

- Residents don't have to explain to new staff how to care for them day after day.
- Residents feel more comfortable with the intimate aspects of care.
- Residents feel more secure with caregivers they know.
- Residents with dementia are much more comfortable with familiar caregivers.
- Residents and their families develop relationships with staff over time.

How does consistent assignment benefit caregivers?

- Caregivers know what each resident wants and needs. They can give individualized care and are more organized in their work.
- Nurses and nursing assistants who work with the same residents most of the time are more likely to notice slight changes in health. This can prevent more serious health problems in the future.
- Caregivers are more likely to understand and respond to the behaviors of residents with dementia. This is important because residents with this condition often let others know what they want and need through their actions.
- Staff members prefer consistent assignment as it lets them better connect to a resident they care for.

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How does consistent assignment benefit nursing homes?

- Staff get to know routines and develop a relationship with assigned residents and others. This makes a better workplace and a better home for residents.
- Caregiver absences are reduced. Staff are more likely to stay in the job when meaningful relationships develop as they know they are being counted on by others in the home.

How do nursing homes achieve consistent assignment?

Many homes that use consistent assignment stop rotating nursing assistants and nurses from one neighborhood, wing or floor every few weeks. Homes instead assign staff to one area of the home so that they can serve one group of residents. These consistent assignments apply to nurses and nursing assistants. This also can apply to housekeeping, dietary and other members of the team.

Of course, it is not possible for the same nursing assistant 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.

The Advancing Excellence Campaign believes a nursing home is successful when staff are caring for the same residents on at least 80-85 percent of their shifts. This means on at least four of five days, evenings and nights, the resident has the same caregivers.

How can you find out whether a nursing home uses consistent assignment?

- Talk with residents about whether they have a nursing assistant who cares for them most days. If the resident cannot answer or has dementia, talk with the family.
- Ask nursing assistants 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 nursing assistants are assigned to care for certain residents.
- Ask if the nursing home uses consistent assignment.

How can you encourage consistent assignment?

- Encourage the nursing home to join Advancing Excellence and chose consistent assignment as a facility goal.
- If the nursing home does not currently use consistent assignment, talk with the director of nursing and the nursing home administrator. Ask them if they would be willing to test it on a small scale first (one neighborhood, wing or shift of the nursing home).