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Responsibility of long-term care mission leaders evolves

By **JULIE MINDA**

A recent December morning found Sr. Kateri Theriault, OSF, hunting for a cheap but reliable car for an employee of St. Leonard's where Sr. Theriault serves as mission integration director.

The staff member who needed the car is raising a family member's two children on her own. She hit hard times last fall from an employee assistance fund, and groceries for Thanksgiving.

Supportive friend is just one role Sr. Theriault fills. Like most mission leaders in nursing homes, she has a long and varied history of educating employees about St. Leonard's mission to provide compassionate care in line with the facility's faith-based values and celebrating the facility's heritage. She consults with residents and their families on their care plans and end-of-life decisions.

And, increasingly, Sr. Theriault is at the table when senior leaders discuss operating plans.

Many mission leaders in long-term care have begun participating in high-level strategy meetings, said Brian Yanofchick, CHA's director of mission leadership development. That's because the Catholic health ministry is reenvisioning the role of mission leaders and encouraging them to work with staff and residents, but also to function on a more strategic level than they may have in the past. CHA has been encouraging mission leaders to participate in operations planning, to have a role on the senior leadership team and to interact with other staff. "Mission care mission leaders need to have a firm grasp of the long-term care field so they can be a credible voice for the mission," he said.

Vicky Schneider, director of mission services for Felician Village of Manitowoc, Wis., has taken up that challenge. "I think the mission leader role change if the mission is going to continue at the facilities where there are fewer sisters present in leadership roles. It's for the mission when decisions are made. Anything that involves operational decision making, financial decisions — things that affect the mission's values."

CHA's Yanofchick said that mission leaders who become more strategic and forward-thinking will be better prepared to handle changes that are implemented. They will be able to help ensure the integrity of the Catholic health mission amid changes in care delivery.

Wired into the community

Yanofchick said part of being more strategic is to make sure that a facility is well-connected to its community. To this end, he has encouraged mission leaders to reach inside and outside of their organizations. Michael Sanderl, vice president of mission integration for Carondelet Health System, recruited 100 employees to serve on mission integration teams at two acute care and three long-term care facilities. He is now working on how best to integrate the mission into Carondelet's work.

Matthew Lohmeier, director of mission for Bon Secours St. Petersburg Health System in Florida, hopes to deepen the mission's connection with members of parishes around St. Petersburg Health System and involving them in Bon Secours' long-term care facilities.

Lohmeier said he hopes that his work and that of other mission leaders unites staff members and community members who have been overlooked.

"If we can provide this care in a way that honors people's dignity, we can tap into the Gospel message by providing life-giving care."

Touching every task

The core of mission leaders' work continues to be centered on employees. That is because employees make mission integration work.

For Lohmeier at Bon Secours, the effort to ensure a good mission fit with employees begins before they're hired. He interviews each candidate at Bon Secours St. Petersburg and assesses the individual's empathy and desire to support the system's mission, particularly for those who are poor and dying.

After employees are hired, the mission leaders orient them to the mission. Then throughout the year, through educational leaders reinforce the mission with all employees.

It is rewarding when mission education takes hold, said Sr. Geraldine Paluszak, OSF, director of mission integration at a facility is part of Franciscan Services Corporation. She described a long-time Franciscan facility employee: "I have seen particularly in our mission and values. She really became a servant leader. And I can say that about so many of our

Kathy Callahan, mission integration director for Mary Immaculate Health/Care Services in Lawrence, Mass., said she see the whole picture. It's when the CNA who maybe had a bad day cares enough to stop before they leave and help it's all about."

Help in crisis

When employees are experiencing stress — whether at work or in their personal lives — mission leaders like Callahan assistance after a 2006 flood; she coordinated aid for workers impacted by last year's earthquake in Haiti; and she has resources.

Schneider of Felician Village said employees deal with emotionally taxing situations, including the decline and death of services, spiritual resources and counsel, mission leaders help staff cope.

This aspect of the mission leader role makes for close relationships, said Sr. Theriault of St. Leonard. "The piece that as both listener and mentor."

She added, "If our employees are well taken care of, and have a sense of our mission and core values, then our respect mission and core values."

Support for patients and families

Most long-term care mission leaders also interact regularly with residents and families. "When you work in long-term residents' living room," said Lohmeier, of Bon Secours St. Petersburg.

Sr. Paluszak of Rosary Care Center regularly walks the halls chatting with the priests and sisters who live there. "Visiting is very rewarding and is worth everything I do," she said.

Stretched thin

Sanderl of Carondelet said that "when mission integration is done well in an organization, there is no group of individuals or unit where I don't have a role, a voice and a place at the table." While that's a plus for the organization, the mission

At Bon Secours St. Petersburg, Lohmeier's influence extends to many areas, including human resources, stewardship trades," he said. "It can be hard to prioritize where to put your time and energy."

Adding to the workload, some systems are reducing their mission leader head count because of budget pressures and responsibility for multiple facilities within a system, Lohmeier said.

Lohmeier thrives on the pace, and the diversity. "No day is like the day before. There is so much variety and opportunity. There's a real opportunity for intimacy with residents and staff," he said.

CHA seminar

CHA is hosting a [seminar for mission leaders in long-term care](#) in St. Louis March 14 to 16. It will provide resources to challenges of serving in a long-term care facility and will provide professional development, networking and personal