

# PROMISING PRACTICES IN HOME AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES

*Virginia / The Nursing Assistant Institute*

## **Issue: Improving recruitment and retention of direct support workers**

### Summary

The Nursing Assistant Institute (NAI) was established in 1999 to provide a multifaceted approach to address the growing shortage of nursing assistants in central Virginia and to improve the quality of long-term care services in that region. NAI's programs improve the training and support that nursing assistants receive in order to increase recruitment, decrease turnover and ultimately provide consumers with a stable workforce that is familiar with their healthcare needs.

### Introduction

Nursing assistants provide the majority of the paid direct support to consumers across the spectrum of long-term care settings. At the same time, providers are faced with the increasingly difficult task of recruiting and maintaining an adequate supply of experienced nursing assistants.

This workforce shortage threatens to impact the quality of care consumers receive and has significant financial ramifications for provider agencies. Several factors contribute to high turnover rates and a lack of new people in the profession, including lack of opportunity for

**Recruiting and maintaining nursing assistants is increasingly difficult.**

career advancement and professional development; highly demanding work for low wages; insufficient training; high incidences of injury; and lack of support and recognition.

The Nursing Assistant Institute (NAI) was created to develop and implement enduring solutions to the nursing assistant shortage in central Virginia. This report provides an overview of the project's activities and is based on information obtained from the program's web site, interviews with program staff and written materials regarding the project.

### Background

In 1998, a survey conducted by the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services revealed that 16% of nursing assistant positions in the Thomas Jefferson Planning District were vacant<sup>1</sup>. Simultaneously, the turnover rate for nursing assistants was estimated to be 130% per year. In 1999, the Jefferson Area Board for Aging (JABA), an Area Agency on Aging that serves the planning district, partnered with two local hospitals, two training centers, a social services organization, and a pharmacy to establish the NAI.

### Intervention

NAI supports nursing assistants that work in a variety of settings, including hospitals, nursing homes, and in people's homes. NAI develops and implements programs designed to improve the recruitment and retention of nursing assistants and enhance the training and support that they receive. This report describes several of these programs.

NAI provides individuals interested in becoming certified nursing assistants (CNAs) with scholarships that pay for Virginia's 120-hour certification training course and with stipends that cover the licensure examination fee.

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<sup>1</sup>The Thomas Jefferson Planning District is comprised of the counties of Albemarle, Nelson, Fluvanna, Greene, Louisa, and the city of Charlottesville

Although licensure is mandatory for individuals who want to work nursing homes, many individuals who complete the training work in other health and long-term care settings including hospitals, assisted living facilities, home health agencies, and adult day care facilities.

To provide continuing education, NAI contracts with local instructors and long-term care facilities to provide free/low-cost advanced training sessions on topics including improving communication skills with managers, wound prevention, and stress management. NAI also trains experienced nursing assistants to become mentors and provide coaching and support to new nursing assistants.

Since finding that nursing assistants often identified lack of respect for their work as the leading cause for job dissatisfaction (over low salary and benefits), NAI develops and operates programs to improve the recognition of nursing assistants. One such activity includes organizing and hosting an annual Nursing Assistant Recognition Event. Program administrators and nursing supervisors from the local long-term care agencies and hospitals in the TJPD are asked to nominate staff for various awards. Recipients are honored based on years of service and professional conduct. Community members and local media are invited and often attend the event.

**NAI's initiatives include scholarships for certification training and low-cost continuing education sessions.**

NAI also provides consulting services to providers. These services include assisting facilities or agencies in implementing culture changes based on the principles articulated by the Pioneer Network. These principles focus on developing a plan of care based on the unique needs and preferences of consumers while assigning staff based on the unique skills and talents of the workers. This model has been implemented in nursing facilities across the country and can be adapted to meet an organization's unique circumstances.

NAI also devotes a significant amount of time to community outreach and education, including lobbying on behalf of nursing assistants for better wages and benefits.

NAI's plans for future activities include the re-establishment of a worker support group, which will provide a forum for nursing assistants to network and learn from one another. Although initial efforts to establish a worker support group were unsuccessful, the NAI has garnered feedback from previous participants and is considering reintroducing this effort during working hours.

### Implementation

The Nursing Assistant Institute was created in April 1999 when the Jefferson Area Board for Aging (JABA) partnered with six local health and social services agencies. Representatives from each of the founding agencies, as well as local long-term care provider agencies and local nursing assistants, comprise the Steering Committee, which provides programmatic guidance, in-kind resources, and limited financial assistance for NAI.

Community outreach and information gathering were the first implementation steps. NAI convened meetings with nurses and administrators from long-term care facilities and providers to assess staffing situations. Simultaneously, nursing assistants were interviewed to obtain their perceptions of their working conditions and job satisfaction. In June 1999, NAI surveyed approximately 150 nursing assistants and 50 nursing directors regarding continuing education and training needs and interests. NAI developed its training curriculum from this information.

In the first year of implementation, funding for the NAI was derived from a combination of small grants and private contributions. Currently, NAI is housed at JABA, and staffed by a part-time coordinator. NAI is funded entirely through private contributions, training fees, and consulting fees. NAI is working to secure additional funding to augment its operations.

In the first year of implementation, program costs were approximately \$40,000 and covered the coordinator's salary, program development (including the cost of providing scholarships for nursing assistants), and administrative costs. By the second year, costs had increased to approximately \$55,000. Program costs will continue to grow as NAI expands the scope of its work and secures additional funding.

### Impact

Since its inception NAI has awarded 37 scholarships, ranging from \$270 to \$350 per recipient, covering the full cost of CNA-certification training. In addition, twenty-five \$80 stipends have been awarded to cover the licensure examination fee.

Although a formal analysis of the NAI's effectiveness has not been conducted, a number of informal indicators suggest that the NAI's programs are contributing to an increase in

recruitment. Since NAI started offering scholarships, local training centers have experienced an influx in registration. Some training centers have experienced a 100 – 150% increase in registrations in the past year. Although retention is more difficult to measure, pre and post surveys of nursing assistants and nursing directors report higher levels of job satisfaction and preparedness following NAI's training sessions.

**Program costs in the first two years were under \$100,000.**

### Contact Information

For more information about the Nursing Assistant Institute, please contact Cheryl Cooper, Coordinator, at (804) 817-5258 or [ccooper@jabacares.org](mailto:ccooper@jabacares.org). Online information about the Nursing Assistant Institute is at <http://monticello.avenue.org/Community/Agencies/JABA/institute>.

### Some Discussion Questions:

**What are the advantages and disadvantages of a regional approach to workforce retention and recruitment, compared to a statewide approach?**

**What are the benefits of surveying direct support workers before implementing the initiative, rather than immediately working to address common challenges direct support workers face across the country?**

This report was written by Kristin Simone, M.M. It is one of a series of reports by The MEDSTAT Group for the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) highlighting promising practices in home and community-based services. The entire series will be available online at CMS' web site, <http://www.cms.gov>. This report is intended to share information about different approaches to offering home and community-based services. This report is not an endorsement of any practice.