

Senior living and long-term care facilities prioritize employee wellness to combat burnout

By CAURIE PUTNAM

Although the word “burnout” became a buzzword during the COVID-19 pandemic, it originated in the 1970s. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines burnout as an occupational phenomenon that occurs from poorly managed, chronic workplace stress.

At or near the top of most lists of industries with the highest levels of burnout is health care, including long-term care. A December 2021 study by HR software company OnShift showed that 80% of senior housing workers believe there is a critical level of burnout in their profession.

Symptoms of burnout, per the WHO, can include feelings of exhaustion, increased mental distance from one’s job and reduced professional efficacy.

How are leaders in Rochester’s senior living and long-term care space helping reduce burnout for their employees? Oftentimes through a thoughtful and thorough emphasis on employee wellness.

At Episcopal SeniorLife Communities — a faith-based nonprofit offering a full continuum of senior care services and senior living communities in the Rochester region — there is a strong focus on employee wellness from a holistic perspective.

“The long-term care component of health care, especially these days, is a very high stress, physically demanding, people interactive and relationship-centric industry to work in,” said Lisa Marcello, president and CEO of Episcopal SeniorLife Communities. “We truly believe that for ourselves and all of our staff, these demands are better handled if you are physically, spiritually, emotionally and socially fit.”

Marcello explains that when employees’ wellness needs are being met at work it helps the patients they work with.

“Our employees are our most important resource in the work that we do,” Marcello said. “No matter what your job is across all our communities, how you feel affects how our residents feel they are treated and the experiences that they have. So, as our most important resource, a robust health and wellness program is very important to us and something that we have been focused on for quite a few years.”

One of the unique ways Episcopal SeniorLife Communities prioritizes employee wellness is by employing two employee health and wellness nurses who work with individuals in need of wellness improve-



Halloran



Marcello

ment strategies and professional guidance toward health management.

The employee health and wellness nurses also chair a wellness committee made up of staff members across multiple communities that help plan special events and programs like the Get Moving Challenge to support positive overall health and wellness.

“One of the other cornerstones of Episcopal we’re probably most proud of is that we also want to support employees spiritually,” said Michelle Halloran, vice president of human resources, who shared that the organization’s chapel at the Episcopal Church Home on Mount Hope Ave. is as a place where individuals of all faith and spiritual beliefs can pray, meditate and reflect privately. Chaplains are also available to staff for counsel on a 1:1 basis.

Among the many other ways, Episcopal SeniorLife Communities supports holistic wellness: earned time off; membership with EZAccessMD, a telemedicine benefit; an Employee Assistance Program (EAP); 401k retirement benefit; career pathways and tuition reimbursement; emergency programs for acute financial need; and celebrations of staff milestones and accomplishments.

At St. John’s, a nonprofit senior living and care provider founded in Rochester in 1899 and rooted in Lutheran heritage, it’s not unusual for employees to bring their pets to work.

“Having pets around adds to employee wellness,” said Dean Moore, vice president of work/life at St. John’s, who notes the past few years have been exceptionally challenging for employees in the long-term care space due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “We like to do things for our employees that help lighten the mood a bit.”

The organization also places high importance on physical wellness with on-site fitness centers and takes full advantage of the location of its St. John’s Home campus on Highland Ave.

St. John’s Home is adjacent to the 150-acre Highland Park, which was designed by



Moore



Oliver

Frederick Law Olmsted and is home to the Lilac Festival. St. John’s teamed up with the American Heart Association to map out trails at the park for employees to use and it is a popular wellness activity.

St. John’s also offers EZaccessMD, and Moore says, “We’re highly confident this benefit has had a very high return on investment,” due to it saving employees time and stress when it comes to managing their and their family’s physical health.

Some of the other ways St. John’s supports employee wellness: paid time off; on-site childcare; an Employee Assistance Program; an employer-sponsored life insurance plan; and employee appreciation events.

At continuing care retirement community Jewish Senior Life, located in Brighton, there is an understanding that work in the senior living space is more than a job.

“It encompasses you completely — head, hands and heart,” said Kim Oliver, director of human resources at Jewish Senior Life, which is a nonprofit care community open

to people of all faiths and ethnic groups, proudly founded by members of the Jewish community.

One of the unique ways the organization provides employee wellness support is through a life and employment success coach who helps employees achieve both professional and personal success.

“Our employment success coach supports employees with overall and complete wellness,” Oliver said. “We want to make sure we are taking care of our employees on and off campus.”

When providing wellness opportunities for staff, Jewish Senior Life is cognizant of the fact that sometimes direct care providers and nurses can’t easily leave their units, so they bring resources to them.

“We meet our people where they are,” said Oliver, who believes Jewish Senior Life offers a receptive and community-based family feel for employees, which aids in their overall wellness.

Some of the other ways Jewish Senior Life supports its employees’ wellness: an early pay option; 401k plus employer contribution; paid time off; employee recognition; free access to an onsite 24/7 wellness center with Fitness on Demand programming; tuition benefits; onsite vaccine clinics and testing; and career path and career development opportunities, with tutoring and training assistance.

Caurie Putnam is a Rochester-area freelance writer.



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Cutting edge technology a necessity for senior living communities

By JIM BARG

As technology keeps moving ever forward, its impact on industries grows. In the world of long-term care, having the ability to update and adapt on the fly is vital, especially in an industry where empathy is required to deal with daily challenges.

For Eileen Ryan-Maruke, St. Ann's vice president of marketing and community relations, being up to date on the latest technology means making things easier for everyone, such as re-implementing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) on the St. Ann's website, establishing 'AI Ann' this past August.

"Ann is an AI that I chose [to use] again after doing some research," she said. "We were already using a system called Snapengage, and after investigating, we decided to try their AI offerings to help with website visitors that were looking for a more guided experience."

That guided experience can take the form of more detailed floor plans or class schedules for those training to be nurses.

"With a very small marketing de-



Fields

partment at St. Ann's, we previously spent a great deal of time answering questions that were sent in to our website," she said. "Ann has been a tremendous time saver not only for our marketing team, but our visitors getting the info they want immediately. It's a win win for all."

Aaron Fields, St. Ann's chief information officer, is the head of an 18-person team that handles the IT challenges of a community with over 1,200 employees. He calls their work a 'true help desk-type component,' providing support to the behind-the-scenes staff.

"They're helping our back-office staff [and] our nursing staff try to get the job done every day," he said. "[Just] making sure things are upgraded and working okay."

Within that team, there are focuses on networking and systems, cybersecurity, governance, risk and compliance.



Masonis

Fields also salutes the work of Katherine Streetter, St. Ann's resident engagement lead, as she transitioned from a career as a dietitian to being a member of St. Ann's IT team.

Over the past year, her focus has been on what Fields called "bleeding-edge technology."

"Her sole responsibility is to find these technologies in the long-term care space that can enhance the resident/family member/caregiver connection," he explained. "We're trying to find technologies that help the resident get through the day and combat feelings of loneliness and boredom."

Fields has helped craft an internal calendar for the IT team that looks ahead three years in order to stay ahead of the curve while answering important questions, such as, "Where do we need to be?" and "What is [future tech] going to look like?"

Some of those questions have already been answered: an increased usage of mobile technology, thanks to millennial-aged nurses who are adept at their smartphones, whether it's an Android or iPhone.

"They can do their documentation in real time, on a smaller device that's easier to maneuver and they can slip into their pocket [while] having their hands free," Fields said.

St. Ann's is also the launching of WorkStation on Wheels (WOW) carts, which Fields described as "a laptop inside a cart."

"The idea is that a nurse or doctor can bring that into a patient's room and document whatever they may need, right there in the medical record, instead of putting it on a clipboard and then walking out to their desk and entering it in," he said.

While most of Fields' work is behind the scenes, the majority of work Travis Masonis does for Jewish Senior Life in his role as chief information officer is resident-facing.

His position is the culmination of what he calls a 15-year "love affair marrying technology and the care of others," having previously worked at Noyes Hospital in Dansville before spending the last 12 years with Jewish Senior Life.

"I love knowing that the technology that I put in place and support have a direct impact on people," he said. "The things that we do from a technology standpoint impact the lives of others in a good way."

It's all part a culture of innovation with the organization.

"[Innovation is] built into everything we do," he said. "We do take risks on technologies and sometimes they work, and sometimes they don't. That comes with the territory."



Ryan-Maruke

One of the risks that has worked is their partnership with Broomx Technologies, a Barcelona-based company that specializes in 270-degree virtual reality projectors. The aim with this technology was to give residents who were mostly unable to leave the Jewish Senior Life premises an immersive experience.

"We can bring residents on an undersea submarine trip, we can put them in the middle of a concert or other things," he explained/

Masonis said that the experiences have led to some unexpected results with the residents.

"We've had residents who haven't spoken a word in a long time actually start to say words again, like 'sky' or 'flower,' after being put in this experience," he said.

Jewish Senior Life was an early adopter of Broomx's work — Masonis says that the company only had two units in the entire United States at the start of their partnership — and its success has Jewish Senior Life looking for more options in the realm of virtual and augmented reality.

"We're looking at expanding that particular technology," he said. "Not just for entertainment purposes, but even for cognitive fitness. I think that holds a lot of promise — it only has one way to go, and that's up."

Other things being worked on include an ongoing partnership with Rochester Institute of Technology, and Masonis noted that working with the students was vital at the height of the pandemic, and the creation of the JSL Connect smartphone app by an in-house team.

"We wanted to build it ourselves because we wanted to brand it ourselves and control every piece of content that was in it," he said. "[The app] allows family members to see what's going on at the facility and with their specific loved ones."

It's all part of fulfilling the desire to build their own solutions, according to Masonis.

Both Fields and Masonis noted that being adaptable to change is important in their positions.

"We have to be nimble with emerging technology," added Masonis, "not just for residents, but for staff as well."

"As fast as technology changes, we're looking for those fundamental shifts that will become commonplace in 10 years, because our resident population is going to change," Fields said.

Jim Barg is a Rochester-area freelance writer.

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