

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.”



Halloran



Marcello



Moore



Oliver

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 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.

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

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.

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