

Asbury Heights finds success by adopting Toyota principles

Friday, March 11, 2011

by Kris B. Mamula



Asbury Heights executives Art Barbus and Debbie Schoonover say Toyota's lean manufacturing principles improved food service at the retirement community.

Senior living services are getting a makeover in Mount Lebanon as Asbury Heights expands use of Toyota's lean manufacturing principles to improve the institution's bottom line and quality of care.

With the help of the **Pittsburgh Regional Healthcare Initiative**, Asbury Heights three years ago began targeting certain areas for improved efficiency. The result was a nice lift to the bottom line.

Now, the residential care complex is taking on patient care issues with the same tools in a bid to transform work culture. The results have been encouraging.

"The genesis of the whole thing was that our expenses were going up 6 percent, 7 percent every year without revenue rising," said **Art Barbus**, senior administrative director at Asbury.

Asbury Heights is a nonprofit, continuing care retirement community with an annual budget of about \$28 million and a variety of residential choices, including independent and assisted living, and skilled nursing care. **It also is among the first such facilities in the region to adopt PRHI's modified Toyota lean manufacturing principles to transform its work culture into one of continuous improvement, said Barbe Jennion, director of PRHI's perfecting patient care program.**

"Everybody who's involved in the process has a voice in the design of that change," she said. "So we educate everybody. They're team members."

Asbury chose first to go with issues that were easily identifiable and measurable, such as electricity use. Asbury inventoried lighting in all of its buildings and recommended switching to high efficiency fluorescent bulbs, Barbus said. Also, motion sensors were installed in some rooms to turn off lights automatically when not in use.

The result: First year savings at the end of 2009 amounted to \$7,900 plus a reduction in the number of calls to change burned out bulbs to 528 from 900 due to the longer-lasting replacements.

Asbury then took on overtime costs, which were costing the institution \$800,000 a year. A reporting mechanism was developed to better track wage expenditures, and changes were made in how scheduling staff were implemented.

As a result, overtime costs were trimmed by \$127,000 in 2009.

In 2009, Asbury Way Café, an alternative eatery used by staff and residents, was losing around \$15,000 every year for reasons that weren't immediately apparent. One of the problems uncovered was a lack of consistency in how food items were prepared, depending on who was on duty, said **Debbie Schoonover**, director of food service.

A menu and recipe book was developed, complete with pictures, so orders were the same, regardless of who filled them, she said. Changes also were made in packaging and reliance on precooked frozen food, a costly option compared to freshly prepared.

In the end, the café realized a net gain of \$30,000 through 2010, Barbus said.

Overall, the return on investment in the PRHI program was 6.5 percent last year, up from 3.5 percent in 2009, Barbus said, and Asbury is on track to reach a return of 9 percent, he said.

Several approaches to improving quality care are being used by skilled nursing facilities, said **Ron Barth**, CEO of the Pennsylvania Association of Nonprofit Homes for the Aging, a Harrisburg-based trade group.

"We have been preaching quality improvement for years," Barth said. "There are different ways to do quality improvement, and any one of them is good to getting to continuous improvement."

-end-