



## **Online CNA training model increases nurse aide staff and boosts morale for Nazareth Home Clifton**

By Lisa Biddle-Puffer, administrator for Nazareth Home Clifton

No career could be so rewarding! I love this profession, but the biggest worry I face as an administrator is having enough well-trained, compassionate people to provide the excellent care our elders deserve. Having spent 24 years in long-term care, this workforce challenge is as tough as I've ever seen it.

Several months ago, John Reinhart, co-founder and president of CNAOnline.com, spoke about a new approach to training CNAs that would appeal to people who were looking for a career in healthcare as nurse aides, and who needed flexibility for training. John's presentation impacted me. We'd been previously working with an outside vendor that would bring students to us and teach them at our facility in a classroom setting. Quite frankly, we weren't satisfied with the results we were getting, and we were looking for a better solution.

People have been providing care on the campus of Nazareth Home Clifton since 1892. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) recognizes our center as one of few modern providers which are carefully measured and assessed to have high-quality nursing home services for promoting health and improving the quality of life. So, you can imagine that keeping our quality at the highest level is really important to us. That includes finding people in the community who have a passion for helping others and training them to be great nurse aides.

When I heard John speak about the new model, CNAOnline.com, that blends online learning from a student's smartphone with in-person, clinical skills training at our facility, I was intrigued. When I heard that Julie Gdowski would be the nurse educator, I was sold. I have known Julie for a long time, and she is a top-notch leader. CNAOnline.com uses a two-instructor approach. They provide an online instructor and we provide the instructor for the clinical skills training, which is held in our facility. At first, I worried that using our own instructor/preceptor to provide skills training would pose a burden to our nursing team. But it has turned out to be a huge benefit for us because she has created a nurturing connection between the students and our center's community.

Our in-house preceptor is an LPN who works full-time as a nurse for us. She is really enjoying training our new students. Acting as preceptor for our new CNAs has given her a morale boost because she is making a difference in the lives of people looking for a new career. For example, the students were worried about learning how to take a person's blood pressure using an arm cuff. The connection with our preceptor gave them one-on-one attention that helped manage their fears and successfully learn to accomplish this essential skill.

CNAOnline.com schedules classes according to the needs of the facility. They can hold classes in as little as two weeks and can stretch them out to a semester for high schools. We are running our classes in a 4-5-week schedule which includes two, 12-hour lab days and three, 12-hour clinical days. With our

previous vendor, the students had to take all five of these days in a row. CNAOnline.com's model spreads the lab and clinical days out, so that the students learn online, then come in and practice. Then they learn more online, then come in for more practice. The students are having much more success with this pace as opposed to overwhelming them with the labs and clinicals at them all at once.

CNAOnline.com uses the nationally-acclaimed course, *How to Be a Nurse Assistant*, for the online, didactic portion. The class is offered in partnership with the American Health Care Association (AHCA). They also have an affiliation with Bethel University, which provides students three college credit hours for the course. I love the fact that we can hire people, put them through this training, and set them up on a career path. The college credit boosts the status and elevates what it means to be a nurse aide.

The curriculum is standardized, and that allows us to easily implement these classes across our two sites. The students have enjoyed the fact that they have access to their coursework 24/7 as well as clinical instruction and technical support. They can access the entire course as an audiobook. Listening to the book could be a game changer for students who are too busy to read or who have trouble learning that way.

We have five people in the class, which is the minimum to hold a class. We recruited our students through social media, and then we interviewed them before putting them in the class. The students we currently have are female and range in ages from 24 to 43. We generated a lot of excitement about the class during the interview. Students love the fact that we pay for the class. We would love to recruit enough people to hold classes on a monthly or every-other-month basis.

At the time of this article, we are waiting to hear the results of the state tests. But we are very positive that we will see great outcomes because of the level of training we have received from CNAOnline.com. We have had a higher retention rate with this group than any other class we've put together. This is because this CNAOnline platform really does speak to the type of people in the workforce that we're trying to recruit. CNAOnline.com embraces technology and the fact that people have busy lives.

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