



Growing our clinical caregiver workforce through an online approach

by Trasee Whitaker

Masonic Homes of Kentucky's entire 150-year history has been about helping people. From its inception as a home for widows and orphans of Masons killed in the Civil War, to two, present-day campuses in Kentucky: Louisville and Shelbyville, Masonic Homes has always put people first. We have excellent employees in every department who share our mission of care. But there is also a tremendous gap in the clinical workforce. We will soon have more jobs than people to fill them. We are obligated to create our own path for people and provide an entrée into this profession.

In 2016, we learned of a different approach to attracting, training and hiring CNAs, and decided to try it. CNAonline.com, powered by Academic Platforms, LLC, based in Louisville, Kentucky, offers a blended approach to CNA training: online courses and in-person, hands-on clinical labs. We have used traditional methods, such as technical college, in the past and weren't getting the payback we needed.

Kentucky CNA courses typically use *Mosby's Textbook for Nursing Assistants*. But because the CNAonline.com course is affiliated with Bethel University and offers three credit hours toward a college degree, the course uses the American Health Care Association's (AHCA's) nationally-recognized curriculum, *How to Be a Nurse Assistant*. Students take the didactic portion of the class completely online and can even access it from their smartphones. The book is also available as an audiobook and can be listened to in its entirety. This makes the course accessible to people who are busy or who might have reading challenges but would still make excellent caregivers. Students come to our communities for the hands-on clinical labs portion.

This is a powerful way to train students because they don't have to miss work to do CNA training. Their income isn't affected, and there is minimal disruption to their lives. Their study time can be done on their own. If they were scheduled to go to a class, they would have to leave work, go to class and wouldn't be paid for time in class.

Julie Gdowski is the course instructor and is a very good leader of people. As a former administrator, Julie understands what is needed because she has done it herself. She has been instrumental in our success because she has developed a way to identify student motivation and time commitment. Because even though the course is online, you do have to spend time on your classwork. Proper vetting, to me, is a best practice for this CNA program.

Since October 2016 we have held three classes and have enjoyed an increase of over 20 percent of our applications online for jobs at Masonic Homes. We have seen trends that our retention is improving because we offer 100 percent tuition-free scholarships for this education, which is a big differentiator for us. We also pay for Licensed Practice Nurse (LPN) training. So, people are very motivated to stay here. To date, we have only invited current employees to take this training. We are considering what it would look like to pay for someone who is not already an employee to go through CNA training.

One of the standouts to this program, for me, is that CNAs are getting college credit that will apply to the LPN program. Our next step is to offer an online LPN course free of charge and we are working on developing that with CNAonline.com.

CNAonline.com's blended approach has been very innovative for us in terms of being able to offer the didactic portion online. I would recommend this approach to anyone who is looking to attract and train new talent for clinical caregivers.

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