

Communication and support: LTC-RISE team brings facility back from the brink of disaster through relationship building and training



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CATEGORY: **Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC)**

The Pennsylvania Department of Health's Northeast LTC-RISE team supported a large skilled nursing facility as they addressed multiple COVID-19 outbreaks. The team adjusted its communication and engagement strategies to provide onsite staff education activities, advice, and resources to assist the facility manage these crises.

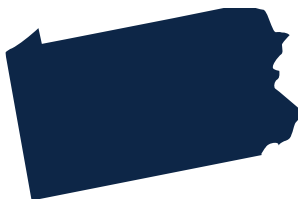


The “What”

In February 2022, a 688-bed skilled nursing facility (SNF), with an average of 470 residents and 700 staff in Northhampton County, Pennsylvania was in crisis. There were seven major COVID-19 outbreaks at this site and due to its size, a consistent struggle to completely eradicate COVID-19 from the population.

This particular facility was a powder keg, dealing with COVID-19 outbreaks, vulnerable populations, and massive quarantines as well as struggling under the weight of vaccine mandates, cohorting, and cyclic testing requirements. The National Guard and regional leadership stepped in to provide crisis support and staffing relief, but once these easements were demobilized, the facility paused all communications and interaction with Northeast LTC-RISE, an initiative at the Pennsylvania Department of Health (PADOH) that uses funding through the Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity for the Prevention and Control of Emerging Infectious Diseases (ELC) cooperative agreement. The relationship seemed fractured and irreparable.

The NE LTC-RISE team gave initial breathing room, but was undeterred. Led by the team's Clinical Lead, the relationship was reconciled through one-on-one support for the facility's administration, comprehensive discussion, and a multi-disciplined approach. The NE LTC-RISE team worked in tandem with the



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SUBMITTED JUNE 2023

National Healthcareer Association (NHA), where support and education were offered to on-site staff. This was the turning point in a once tenuous relationship, modeling precise tact and understanding by listening to concerns, providing needed resources, and bespoke education to the team.

The “So What”

After continuous and ongoing outbreaks, for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, this large county-owned SNF was cleared of outbreaks on May 1, 2023.

The LTC-RISE program looks to build **resiliency through trusting relationships**. The NE team met the facility where they were, listened to understand their needs, provided education and are now viewed as a resource.

Comprehensive training was offered to staff on Emergency Donning and Doffing and Fit Testing: Train-the-Trainer during the initial crisis. Later, all seven modules of Project Firstline were presented during a mandatory two-week nursing in-service. One hundred seventy-nine (179) staff were educated during the SNF’s annual competency. Since the beginning of the NE LTC-RISE team and SNF relationship, weekly check-ins have been maintained to address any further quality improvement training needs. The NE LTC-RISE team will also provide additional Escape Room trainings in the coming months.

It was imperative to understand the dynamics that affected this relationship during the pandemic. The LTC-RISE program looks to build resiliency through trusting relationships. The NE team met the facility where they were, listened to understand their needs, provided education and are now viewed as a resource. The multi-step, multi-level approach to relationship recovery provides consistency in communication. Multiple touch points and in-person communication with the facility helps to optimize reporting and minimize interruptions.

The on-going relationship with this facility and being seen as a critical resource to them as an immense success in the LTC-RISE program.

The “Now What”

The Northeast LTC-RISE team plans to continue to assist the facility as the work through emergency preparedness/all-Hazards planning. The team also plans to provide additional trainings that include Health Equity, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; 4Ms (What Matters, Medication, Mentation, and Mobility) Framework for Age-Friendly Health Systems; Living Learning Network; Burnout; Infection Prevention and Control; Team STEPPS (an evidence-based set of teamwork tools, aimed at optimizing

patient outcomes by improving communication and teamwork skills among healthcare teams); Resident Mobility and Mentation; and Falls.

Northeast LTC-RISE will continue visits and touchpoints to support facilities with their needs, support residents and mitigation efforts with strategies specifically including line list, timely testing, timely reporting of testing results, resident care, contingency staffing and planning, and addressing unique needs of a given outbreak.

Key contributors to this project include Melanie Marien, Theresa Cleary, and Helena Heppard, Pennsylvania Department of Health Northeast RISE Team.