

Pennsylvania LTC-RISE supports COVID-19 response and quality improvement at long-term care facility in Northeast Pennsylvania



CONTRIBUTOR: Megan Barbour (on behalf of Pennsylvania Department of Health Northeast LTC-RISE Team), Director, Long-Term Care Transformation Office, Pennsylvania Department of Health

CATEGORY: Epidemiology and Laboratory Capacity (ELC)

The Pennsylvania Department of Health's Northeast LTC-RISE team supported a skilled nursing facility as they addressed multiple COVID-19 outbreaks and staffing issues. The team provided onsite staff education activities, advice, and resources that was invaluable while managing these crises.



The “What”

A rural skilled nursing facility (SNF) in Pennsylvania's Northeast Region (Wayne County) was struggling with COVID-19 outbreaks and staffing issues. The facility requested assistance from the Northeast LTC-RISE team, 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.

From January 2022 through June 2023 the Northeast LTC-RISE team provided various aspects of support to the SNF. This has included COVID-19 outbreak response, conducting Fit Testing Train-the-Trainer events, providing trainings on topics such as personal protective equipment donning and doffing, fulfilling staffing requests, maintaining daily contact to provide technical assistance by answering questions, and establishing a quality initiative training program.



More stories are available at stories.cste.org

SUBMITTED JUNE 2023

The “So What”

This facility experienced 12 COVID-19 outbreaks including one in December 2023 that started in their locked Dementia unit. There were 9 staffing requests placed with 7 approved and 2 deferred. Staffing requests are approved through the State of Pennsylvania at no cost to facilities. This aid was discontinued Statewide on January 14th, 2023, after almost 3 years of support and resiliency efforts.

The assistance provided to our facility via the LTC-RISE program during the COVID-19 pandemic was **invaluable**. They provided advice, information, and onsite training.

Email Testimonial from Director of Nursing at the SNF, June 13, 2023:

To Whom It May Concern,

The assistance provided to our facility via the LTC-RISE program during the COVID-19 pandemic was invaluable. They provided advice, information, and onsite training. The consultants were easily accessible, friendly, and always willing to share their knowledge by phone, by text, and in person. They continue to help guide us through the evolving changes in regulations and recommendations generated by the ending of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

Members of the NE LTC-RISE team recently provided an onsite staff education activity on Infection Control that was innovative, fun, and informative, and very well received by staff. They are scheduled to return to our facility in July and August for additional staff education activities on dementia and fall prevention.

Overall, the LTC-RISE program has been a tremendous help. We hope to continue to have ongoing access to their staff and resources.

Sincerely,

Director of Nursing

Infection Preventionist/ Assistant Director of Nursing

The “Now What”

The Northeast LTC-RISE team plans to continue to assist the facility as the work through emergency preparedness/all-Hazards planning; implement a survey assesses workplace culture focusing on safety, communication, operational risk, resilience/burnout, and engagement; follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Stopping Elderly Accidents, Deaths, and Injuries (STEADI) initiative to further improve resident safety; and assist with on-going quality improvement.

The biggest opportunity and threat for the SNF appears to be the 40% vacancy rate and the lack

of hiring any students from the allied health program at the local technical school. The SNF has an affiliation with the school. Prior to the pandemic, the facility would conduct job fairs on site and students would come to the SNF for shadowing and learning opportunities. LTC-RISE will work with the SNF to re-establish and strengthen this initiative.

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 LTC-RISE Team.