

Aged care workers to leave industry en masse due to stress, warns study

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Almost a third of registered aged care nurses are considering quitting in the next year because of job stress, says a new University of Melbourne study.

The study, conducted by the Centre for Human Resource Management at the University of Melbourne and the Australian Nursing Federation finds Victoria's registered nurses in Victoria's aged care sector are "emotionally exhausted" and not committed to their workplace.

It cites excessive workloads, cost cutting, a hostile work environment and competing role demands as causing the stress.

The study was based on a survey of over 1000 registered nurses and personal care workers in Victoria last year.

University of Melbourne researchers Associate Professor Leisa Sargent, Professor Bill Harley and Ms Belinda Allen say the study also reveals that aged care facilities need to drastically improve their training and human resource management.

"Facilities that provide more training, have rigorous recruitment, selection and performance management practices and developed grievance procedures benefit from staff who have a more positive attitude toward their work and better physical and mental health outcomes.

"Workers at these facilities also reported that the quality of care provided for residents was better than workers at facilities where there were poor human resource management practices and high levels of cost cutting in relation to staffing levels. In particular having fewer residents for each nurse to care for was associated with less frequent medication errors."

Associate Professor Sargent says current Commonwealth funding arrangements for nursing homes, introduced in 1997, have placed pressure on operators to cut costs.

"The rapidly-ageing population in Australia is placing an unprecedented strain on aged-care provision and it seems likely this pressure will continue in coming years," she says.

"This pressure is likely to further damage the quality of working life for staff and undermine resident care."

A report on the findings will be presented at the Australian Nursing Federation's Aged Care Nurses Conference in Melbourne on Friday, to be opened by the Federal Minister for Aging, Justine Elliot.

Source: University of Melbourne

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