

Florida SNF Staff Grieve Losses

Haitian Tragedy Takes A Toll On Staff, Family Members

The Haitian disaster has taken its toll on Haitian staff members in the United States who have lost family members. Many providers in south Florida, where a particularly high concentration of nursing staff are of Haitian descent, are overwhelmed with grieving staff who have learned of the death of many loved ones, or anxiously await news. Some facilities also report the loss of staff who were visiting Haiti at the time of the earthquake.

Irvine, Calif.-based Sun Healthcare Group, for example, lost a long-time employee who had been with the company since 1995.

“We know we have hundreds of employees whose loved ones and families have been injured or killed,” wrote Richard Matros, Sun’s chief executive officer, a few days after the quake. Sun is working with the American Red

Cross and has launched a company-wide fund-raising effort, matching all employee contributions up to \$50,000.

Kindred Healthcare, Louisville, Ky., has donated \$50,000 to the Red Cross and is also matching employee contributions.

Kennett Square, Pa.-based Genesis Healthcare donated \$20,000 to the U.S. Agency for International Development.

In Delaware, long term care providers helped a 20-member volunteer medical team prepare for its journey to the port town of Jacmel.

In Florida, facilities across the state are responding to the Haitian earthquake with “grief counseling, organizing mission trips, gathering supplies to send to those in need, and preparing to take evacuees requiring skilled nursing services if necessary,” the Florida

Health Care Association (FHCA) reported in its newsletter.

Employees from several Tampa-based Greystone Health Care Management facilities took a missionary trip shortly after the quake to provide assistance, FHCA said. Staff from Life Care Center in Sarasota organized an ongoing airlift of food, medical supplies, and other necessities. FHCA has donated \$10,000 to the Red Cross on behalf of its members.

The personal tragedy is expected to be so widespread that FHCA is anticipating that it could impact facilities’ ability to meet the state’s high staffing mandate, as certified nurse assistants (CNAs), licensed nurses, and other staff travel to Haiti to find and be with their families. Providers say they may need a temporary reprieve from state staffing requirements as they support and cope with grieving and absent staff.

“Fifty-one percent of our nursing staff is Haitian,” wrote one facility, where a dozen staff members were awaiting news on the status of family members. Two of the facility’s CNAs on vacation in Haiti were unaccounted for, and a mother-daughter nurse team had already left for Haiti to search for their husband and father.

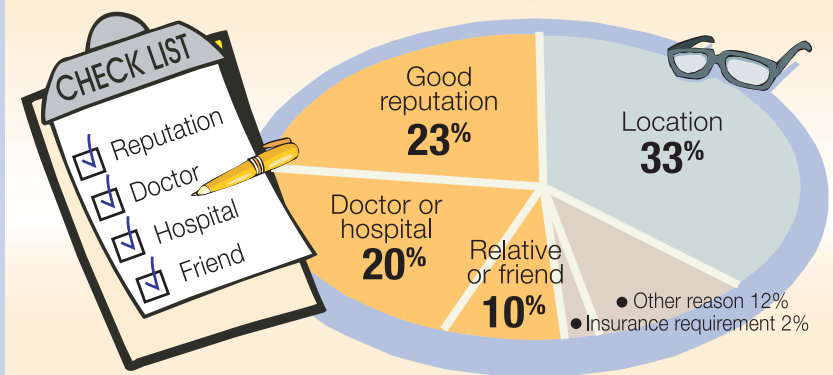
Following are excerpts from other accounts sent to FHCA describing the strain on staff and appealing for latitude from the state:

■ “One employee lost 13 family members, including a sister and brother; another lost nine members, and almost everyone has received word of someone who has died. We are definitely having issues with staffing as the employees are unable to come to work because of grief and waiting to hear any news.”

■ “We have about 70 employees from Haiti. Seventy percent of those em-

By The Numbers

Feedback from others impacts choice of nursing home



Based on responses to the survey item, “What is the most important reason you (or your family) chose this facility?”

Source: Skilled Nursing Resident and Family Satisfaction Surveys collected in 2009 by My InnerView

ployees are CNAs. We have had several employees who have lost as many as 12 family members....They will need time to grieve and be with their families.”

■ “Over 90 percent of the staff at our facility is Haitian...Many of them have not heard from their loved ones and are eager to return to Haiti as soon as they are able to assist their families...”

■ “We have six staff members that

were in Haiti on vacation that we have not heard from yet.”

■ “My [director of nursing] DON and [assistant] DON are Haitian, my director of social services and 90 percent of the CNAs here are of Haitian descent. All of us have suffered tremendous loss of life and missing relatives... I anticipate a mass exodus of staff once the country reopens so that they may

go and bury their dead and attend to family affairs.”

■ “Ninety-five percent of the CNAs in our facility are Haitians (a total of 23 and two nurses). They all have family members or close relatives living in the devastated area.” One CNA lost 18 members of her family, the facility reported.

—Lynn Wagner

D.C. Provider Awaits News Of Niece Haitian Earthquake Spares Her Family, But Not Her School

The randomness of where you are when a tragedy strikes put Solanges Vivens’ niece, Indra, in the market shopping on the day the earthquake struck Haiti. Being in that market, on Jan. 12 at 4:53 p.m. nearly killed Indra, but had she been in any other type of building, it might not have saved her.

As fate would have it, Indra would spend nearly six days in the grocery, lying down, pinned in a tiny open space without any water and no way of knowing if the market would be her final resting spot. Only prayers, rescue workers, and luck could save her.

Back in the United States, the Tuesday that the earthquake hit would be hardest on those with family in Haiti. One of those people was native Haitian Vivens, an operator of two skilled nursing facilities and an educational center in Washington, D.C.

She kept in close contact with the other five members of her family on the island and prayed for Indra’s survival while tracking rescue operations on television.

“They found her car in the parking lot, but not her...another niece and her father were out every day and

night,” Vivens says of the search for 40-year-old Indra, an architect.

What Vivens and her relatives did not know was that Indra was alive, thanks to a twist of good fortune that put her

Vivens’ Mayer Jacmel school suffered major damages in the recent earthquake.



to drink,” according to an e-mail account of her ordeal from a relative in Haiti.

As the days went by, no word came. Finally, after nearly a week, Vivens would see with her own eyes what became of Indra. While scanning the news on CNN she gleefully watched as Indra was pulled out of the market debris to safety.

“She was almost like in a coffin in there,” Vivens says.

Her family attributes Indra’s survival to the power of God and Indra’s willpower. Doctors in Haiti have told her to drink lots of water to avoid future kidney problems. “We found everyone, but three people are homeless, but oh to be homeless

and not dead,” Vivens says.

Haiti is a place Vivens hardly knows anymore because of the nation’s long slide into poverty. The fields that grew crops and gave people sustenance and income are gone, she says. “It is a

bad situation. The people who used to cultivate the land are overcrowded, living in Port-au-Prince,” Vivens says.

In 1988, Vivens founded VMT Long Term Care Management, which manages the operation of the Washington Center for Aging Services and J.B. Johnson Nursing Center in the nation’s capital. A few years later, her company started the VMT Education Center and Training Academy and added a home health agency in 1995 and a practical nursing program in 1997.

In addition to her own experience and that of Indra and her family, Vivens has a third major tie that binds her to Haiti: a school she took over in Mayer Jacmel in 2005.

The school, which suffered major

damage from the quake, is special to Vivens since it provides educational opportunities to children as young as five to young adults as old as 22 to 23 who would otherwise go without such a chance to learn.

“I have not heard from the kids yet [240 attend],” she says, noting that much work will be needed to get the facility running again due to damage from the earthquake and displacement of the students and their families. This means more money, and for that Vivens asks people to visit the school’s Web site and donate to the school, a nonprofit 501(c). The Web site is www.cecm-haiti.org.

For now, and in addition to her nursing facility business duties, Vivens

works on getting medical help for Indra, sketching out fund-raising plans for the school, and thinking long and hard about the day Haiti suffered such devastation.

“I went there [the school in Haiti] this Christmas to have the first Christmas party there. I drove that road that is now in ruins on Dec. 26, 2009...to me it is mind boggling that I just drove there,” Vivens says.

Please note that the American Health Care Association has dedicated a portion of its Web site (www.ahcancal.org/News/Pages/EarthquakeHaiti.aspx) to provide links to contribute to the Red Cross and other organizations assisting those affected by the earthquake.

—Patrick Connole

Assisted Living Occupancy On The Upswing

An increase in the national assisted living occupancy level may be due in part to a slowdown in the number of job losses—a figure recently released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics—according to the National Investment Center for Seniors Housing & Care (NIC), Annapolis, Md.

During third quarter 2009, national occupancy for assisted living rose to 89 percent, up from 88.5 percent in second quarter 2009. The half percentage point increase may signal that assisted living occupancy reached bottom during the recession, says Michael Hargrave, NIC MAP vice president.

Since the recession began in December 2007, occupancy levels dropped to their lowest point of 88.5 percent during first and second quarters 2009.

The Labor Bureau’s number of reported job losses for December 2009 showed a significant slowdown. During December,

the bureau estimated that 85,000 jobs from nonfarm payrolls had been lost.

“Seniors housing, and especially assisted living, may be benefiting from a slowing in the pace of job reductions,” NIC reported. Analyzing unemployment and assisted living occupancy levels since fourth quarter 2005, NIC found evidence of a relationship between the change in unemployment levels and assisted living occupancy levels.

Assuming the correlation between unemployment and occupancy continues, if more recent labor statistics continue to show improvement during fourth quarter

2009, then it stands to reason assisted living occupancy may continue to recover, NIC says.

Hargrave says assisted living administrators and operators can view unemployment figures, gross domestic product, consumer confidence, housing prices, and the time it

takes to sell a home as factors affecting the general psyche of consumers in the market for assisted living.

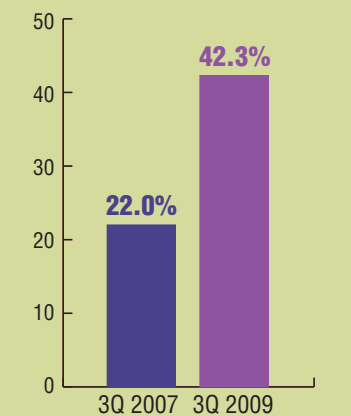
Hargrave points to a slowdown in seniors housing operators’ ability to ask for yearly rent increases as another important indicator for administrators to watch. Data from NIC’s MAP survey shows the number of providers asking for smaller rent increases almost doubled.

“We have seen more properties reporting no or very little rent increases,” he says. During third quarter 2007, 22 percent of properties reported increasing rent between zero to 1 percent, compared with third quarter 2009, when 42.3 percent of the properties reported rent increases of zero to 1 percent. “This number has implications on operators’ profitability. Expenses generally grow at about 2 percent a year,” says Hargrave. “Operators have to make fundamental operating changes in order to maintain profitability because they aren’t asking for rent increases.”

Despite the slowdown in rent growth, seniors housing is faring better overall when compared to other segments of commercial real estate during this period, says Hargrave.

—Lisa Gelhaus

MORE PROVIDERS ASK FOR SMALLER RENT INCREASES, BETWEEN 0-1%



Reprinted with NIC's permission.
Source: NIC MAP