



To: Representative Dawn Morrell, Co-Chair
Rick Hall, Co-Chair
Members of the Long Term Care Workers Training Workgroup

From: Eleni Papadakis, Executive Director,
Workforce training and Education Coordinating Board

Date: November 5, 2007

Re: Thoughts for the last meeting

I apologize that I cannot be there in person with you all as you come to final recommendations on the hours and certification process for basic training. But I wanted to offer some perspectives from the Workforce Board, and also from my prior experience with enhancing education and training options for long term care workers.

At our last meeting, I believe it was Jonathan Seib who articulately described the dilemma of building a larger well-skilled workforce, while maintaining and improving the skills of the current workforce. Jonathan suggested that we should be able to do both, and I agree wholeheartedly. From the Workforce Board's perch, we can't help but be unsettled by the projections of the thousands of new long term care workers needed over the next 20 years. We absolutely need to begin attracting and preparing new workers in this field who desire to stay and grow in their jobs as direct care providers. Training is an incentive to young people and adults in transition who are looking for careers rather than just jobs. To provide direct care to vulnerable people is daunting even for those who have the heart for this type of work. Having a solid orientation, realistic expectations, and the ability to anticipate and handle challenges as they arise will give new workers a solid footing and the confidence they need to excel on this path.

But we also have a large population of people who are already in service. We don't want to lose them, but we do want them to have opportunities for skill development if it is needed. For those workers who want to be able to advance within the long term care field, they will be pleased to participate in further training, if we make training accessible and ensure that no wages are lost in the process. For those who are engaged in caregiving either for family members or for a short term stint, we must think about a process that allows them to "challenge out" of further training. I want to be clear that I am not suggesting that anyone in the service of caregiving be exempted from a high standard of performance and accountability. But as many people have mentioned over the course of our discussions, there are many providers who already excel at their charge, and those people should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency.

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That said, “challenge” tests and the competency assessments that we will undertake for new entrants to the workforce should be as accessible, customizable, and as non-threatening as possible and yet still be a valid assessment. Avoid paper and pencil exams and look at the range of multimedia and on-line assessment techniques in use for entry-level and limited English-speaking workers. These are designed to be engaging and easy to navigate.

Number of Hours: Again from the Workforce Board perspective, but also from my work on the Extended Care Career Ladder Initiative, I have to push the envelope on hours of training. I’ve reviewed the list of topics and can’t imagine how we can adequately cover all the competency areas with fewer than **120** hours of training. I know that cost and time are important factors, but I implore the group to think about the range of training and “challenge-out” options that are available, particularly if the program of study can be modular in design. I also ask that you think about the partnership of trainers, consumers, healthcare providers, employer organizations, and others as a training team. The collective resources and shared ownership of a service community reduces the cost and burden for any single entity, and can enhance training with the infusion of diverse experiences.

Training time should be a cumulative set of sequential learning opportunities that are customized to the type of work an individual will be doing and the learning style of the worker. I have argued for at least 40% of training time to be experiential. Think about supervised on-site training as not just an option, but a significant opportunity for most new workers. We are also in a rich age of technological delivery of education and training. On-line, video, or hybrid programs have tremendous reach and the benefit of being open-entry, self-paced, and modular. With built in assessments, e-learning also provides instant feedback on a student’s progress and the ability to “loop” back to unlearned material.

I understand that the development of an e-learning program may seem like a costly investment, but amortized over many workers and many years will pay for itself in short order. Additionally, a system that trains as well as assesses workers electronically will significantly reduce staff hours and enhance the state’s ability to track system effectiveness.

Lastly, I want to express my appreciation to all my colleagues on the workgroup for allowing me to engage with you in this robust and passionate journey. It is my privilege to have worked with a group that cares so deeply about the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. And a special thanks to our co-chairs and facilitators, who have the unwieldy task of turning all our discussions into a cohesive, coherent set of recommendations.

All my best,
Eleni