

THOUGHT LEADERS

HOME CARE

Staffing shortages, complex regulations challenge home care industry



ALL PHOTOS: JOED VIERA

Hospice Buffalo CEO Dr. Christopher Kerr, above, seated next to Laurie Cianfrini of People Inc., says the company dealt with home care staffing issues by bumping up salaries. Staffing and retention are also a problem for Joyce Markiewicz of Catholic Health, below, and William Gillick of Homewatch CareGivers.

BY TRACEY DRURY
tdrury@bizjournals.com

With more people requiring care and fewer people to provide it, home care providers say they're struggling.

Besides simply attracting and keeping people on the job, home care providers deal with issues around pay scale, transportation, state and federal regulations and increased expectations from patients and families.

That was the sentiment among providers who participated in a Thought Leaders conversation sponsored by Hodgson Russ LLP and Buf-

falo Business First.

At several agencies, including Hospice Buffalo, families are waiting too long to reach out for care.

"We have what we're calling escalating acuity in patients," said Dr. Christopher Kerr, CEO. "In the old days, we had weeks to work with them. Now we may be limited at times to hours. It's feeling more like emergent care delivery of acute problems when it's actually chronic and progressive."

The delay in seeking care sometimes means agencies can't even supply a home care worker because demand or the services they require outweighs supply.



with LAURIE CIANFRINI, WILLIAM GILLICK, DR. CHRISTOPHER KERR, JOYCE MARKIEWICZ, JENNIFER REDDING AND LISA WIEDEMANN



“We’re seeing patients coming to us later in the disease trajectory, so we have a very limited window to deal with highly symptomatic patients and very traumatized families.”

DR. CHRISTOPHER KERR,
CEO, Hospice Buffalo



“It’s a demanding field, especially as people age, and there’s more chronic conditions we’re charged with managing.”

LAURIE CIANFRINI,
vice president, People Inc.



“We go back and forth with the insurance companies to always have to prove that we’re in there for a reason and the patient needs our care.”

JOYCE MARKIEWICZ,
CEO, Catholic Health Home and Community-Based Care



“People are not calling because they think they might need health care for mom and dad. They’re waiting, they’re calling to start tomorrow.”

WILLIAM GILLICK,
owner/CEO, Homewatch CareGivers



“One of the challenges is finding caregivers who are able to work an unpredictable work schedule who have that flexibility and are passionate about what they do.”

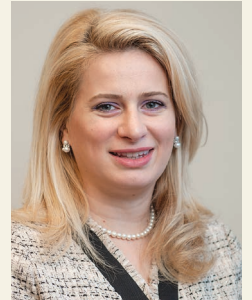
LISA WIEDEMANN,
owner/president, Home Instead Senior Care



“Cost containment is a problem: making sure we keep overhead down and provide the quality care we need and still have margin left over at the end of the day.”

JENNIFER REDDING,
vice president, Niagara Hospice/Liberty Home Care

► **HODGSON’S TAKE**



“Availability of the workforce isn’t there. Some of it is partly generational challenges and what people expect from their employers. Providers are dealing with losing workers to another provider paying maybe 20 or 30 cents more. The other issue has been the never-ending regulations with any corresponding increase in reimbursement.”

EMINA PORICANIN,
partner, Hodgson Russ LLP

► **CLOSER LOOK**

Thought Leaders is an ongoing series of discussions with Western New York business leaders and attorneys at Hodgson Russ LLP.

Each month, leaders in diverse industries meet for a roundtable discussion moderated by Business First journalists. Excerpts from the conversation are published after the roundtable.

Discussions are held in the law firm’s Pearl Street offices in Buffalo.

“They drag their feet,” said Lisa Wiedemann, owner and president of Home Instead Senior Care, which provides non-medical, companionship services. “Sometimes we get squeezed out. We may have a client we help for years, then when it gets to a point where they are medically at that point, we have to pass them off to another company.”

All providers said they’re looking at telehealth and apps on phones and devices to help clients and caregivers report things such as vital statistics and scheduling to maximize the time spent working together.

That also enables caregivers to get to their next appointment quicker, providing services to another client or two.

They also offer training and special benefits to help ensure workers get off to a good start and stay in the job.

At People Inc., a program that uses telehealth to bring nurses into the home has already helped to reduce more costly hospital visits while allowing clients to stay at home, away from potential hospital-acquired conditions, as well.

“At the end of the day, we want to provide the best quality of care at the right time and in the right place,” said Laurie Cianfrini, vice president. “With technology expanding and all of the electronics we have available, we can provide that care for our population right in their home. That benefits us all.”

Staying relevant, and solvent, in the future will mean finding ways to get



Lisa Wiedemann of Home Instead Senior Care says her company works only with private-pay customers in the region.

ahead of reimbursement issues. Jennifer Redding, vice president of Niagara Hospice/Liberty Home Care, said having affiliated programs such as palliative care and a durable medical equipment company means the agency becomes more of a one-stop shop.

“In the future we may need additional resources or day care for patients, but also for staff to keep them engaged and

keep them coming to our agency,” she said. “We need creative ways to keep the workforce engaged and employed.”

Bringing clients into common spaces could also help, said Joyce Markiewicz, CEO of Catholic Health Home and Community-Based Care.

“We’re not going to have enough caregivers in people’s homes. We’re going to have to concentrate them,” she said.