

Lucas

Welcome to Bridge the Gap podcast, the senior living podcast with Josh and Lucas. An exciting episode on today with some great content. We want to welcome to the program, John Milesen, welcome to the show.

John Milesen

Thanks very much, Lucas, really glad to be with you and Josh today.

Lucas

Well, we're excited. You know, John is the Executive Director of Senior Living Chaplains, which is a division of Marketplace Chaplains. And we're going to talk about a very important topic today. Team members, their burnout, compassion, fatigue, mental and emotional health. We're going to talk about the overall value of chaplain care in senior living and for the team members in these companies that are doing this heavy lifting day in and day out of the most important work, which is caring for our elders. John you're on the front lines of this. Obviously you are a passionate champion for chaplain care in senior living. Why is that?

John Milesen 01:45

Well, we really are Lucas. The core of all of this is that people are valuable and it's extraordinary what the professional caregivers in senior living do for residents, for patients and for each other every day. And there's no time like the last two years plus during the pandemic where this has been exemplified. It is extraordinary to be able to walk alongside folks who are constantly pouring themselves out for the benefit of those that they're caring for in senior living communities, skilled nursing facilities, rehab centers all through the United States, north America.

Josh 02:28

Well, John, so I'm a firm believer in chaplain services for not only the benefit of the residents and their families, but for team members. The past few years our industry it's no surprise we've gone through some rough times as a country. These communities that are caring for a fragile population have really stepped up to the plate. But with that, a lot of the things that Lucas mentioned earlier, the compassion, fatigue, that burnout in an industry that quite frankly already struggled with some of that, not to the level we've seen over the past couple years, but it just made things a lot worse. Tell us what you've observed, your organization has observed, particularly in the healthcare and senior care, the aging population space and how you think potentially that you're seeing your services and chaplain services can be used effectively to help engagement and retention of this very valuable workforce.

John Milesen 03:48

Well, we serve great companies, companies like Trilogy Health Services and Bickford Senior Living and Bethesda Senior Living, and Touchstone Communities and Sunset Senior Communities. And all of this that I'll share comes from the perspective of our service of those companies and others. The focus of this is that what we see, what I see is that folks are called to serve in senior living settings. And I use that term intentionally. They're put together that way. God has formed and shaped the compassionate caregivers and senior living really wonderfully to serve in those settings. But when you're constantly

pouring yourself out and during the times where the senior living community skilled nursing facilities were closed to family and others, these team members had to become everything to everybody under the roof. And with all of that, the level of compassion fatigue, and for many burnout raised way up. On Shift and Society for Human Resource Management and the surgeon general in the United States and others have pointed to the issues that we've all been dealing with most specifically in senior living in this setting.

John Mileson 05:16

And so to focus on this compassion fatigue issue. When you have folks who are there to take care of others and they love doing it, they're called to do this more than a job. It is absolutely a calling. And in that setting, they come to a place where they're so tired, and so exhausted, and with understaffing issues and all of this, they begin to close up. They can't be out there fully embracing the opportunities of the resident or patient in front of them. And so as that compassion fatigue sets in and the reality of the exhaustion and other things unfortunately folks have left the industry and left those settings. So chaplains who serve in those settings can come alongside most often in person, but even during the times when the communities were closed virtually to have built a trust relationship with these caregiving professionals to get to know them, to get to know their families through that team member.

John Mileson 06:29

And we build that trust, working confidentially with each one and all. And so that unique relationship opens up a connection so that the team member and the team members have someone that they can trust with these things that are most significant in their lives and most significant in their work. And so through that, as soon as you have a connection with somebody, you can trust, you can begin to have healing and healthy next steps in the mental, emotional, spiritual, relational aspect of life with a qualified, well trained, well experienced, caregiving professional, which the chaplain is serving these, these team members.

Josh 07:19

Well I want to touch on and dig a little bit on something that you mentioned. You mentioned kind of the well trained aspect. So these chaplains and what your recommendation is and, what you guys have been successful in is actually having someone that is serving the community that has been specifically trained for that. And I think a lot of us just lay people, maybe that don't fully understand how a chaplain has been prepared uniquely to help someone through not just what they're experiencing at work, but I would assume many of these conversations probably deal as much with life as much as just their specific job duties, because we're all living in difficult times and been through some difficult times, but what is a chaplain uniquely prepared to deal with that maybe the, the average employer and other kind of coworker is not equipped to deal with in the same way?

John Mileson 08:28

That's a great question, Josh. The core of it, the chaplains that we bring on board, quite frankly, we are also looking for those that God has been preparing to serve in a role like this. You think about someone who comes into a setting, meeting folks and with all of life's challenges and issues before them. And they come in with all of the experience and training that they've had in their lives. So for example, we look at formal training experience. the formal training in a pastoral care or chaplain-like training background. We also look for 10 years or so of experience working with individuals, couples, and families with all the life

stuff, everything that takes place in a proven track record, carefully vetting every chaplain candidate. And then the chaplain that comes on board then goes through a training time.

John Milesen 09:31

That's led by our marketplace academy. Our academy both delivers training for the initial chaplains, but also on an every month basis. There are training elements of monthly meetings led by our executive directors of operations for the chaplains that they oversee. So there's an ongoing investment, never ending investment in both learning and growing in this. So the combination of being put together to deliver care in setting such as this. The training that takes place, both in how we handle chaplain care and workplaces, but also specific training for senior living settings and going beyond that. There's specific training and mentoring as we begin to serve in a new company for their vision, their values, how they go about what they do, and so that we can connect well and represent the leadership of that company very well. And so it's very different from being a pastor. I've served as a pastor, as well as a business leader, and as a chaplain. It's very different. That setting is where work is taking place, where in this case, residents and patients are being cared for. And we get to be a part of that team of folks that take care of the team members. So they can be freed up to take great care of the residents and patients as well.

Josh 11:32

So, John, what does for your average, if that can even be defined, but your average senior living senior care community that's out there. What does a program practically look like? Is this daily chaplain interaction? Is this weekly, or is it monthly? Is it virtual? Is it in-person? Practically speaking, what does the day in the life of an average chaplain look like engaging with a community?

John Milesen 12:08

So Josh, as we get to know the company and the community, we understand how many people, how many team members are in that setting, the shifts. Our intention is to connect well with everybody in that community or in that skilled nursing facility. And so we always will select a team that best fits that setting. So if the, if a number of the team members have a first language other than English, could be Spanish, it could be Vietnamese, could be Korean, could be Creole, whatever it might be. We will have a matchup in the language culture specific of the team members in that setting. So in every case, male, female chaplain team who would make regular visits again, depending on the size of the community, regular visits each week, but there may be multiple visits each week to connect with the team members, brief touches, continue to build relationships, build on the relationship that's already there.

John Milesen 13:09

And those are really relationship building types. They are also to take the temperature of the community and those serving in the community. But much of what we get to do takes place away from the workday. You mentioned before so much of what we help people with are the life challenges, those things that are going on at home, in the midst of all the challenges of caring for the residents and patients. And so we're available 24/7. For marketplace chaplains, senior living chaplains, we have an app, Chaplains with an app. And we call it our MyChap App. And it gives direct connection to the chaplains who serve that particular community or facility. So, you know, pictures don't have to fumble for a card, direct connections by cell phone, email, text, or video chat through that app, along with some other great resources delivered.

John Milesen 14:08

But in that any time of the day, you can connect with your chaplain. And so often in the busy schedules of the caregiving professionals in the community, that call's gonna take place on the way home, a cell phone to cell phone call to connect. But we're invited to people's homes to help with family challenges and issues that are there, the teenage son or daughter that won't listen to mom or dad, whatever the case might be. We have, we'll have coffee after work. We're there at the hospital when a baby's born, when surgery takes place, team member or family member. So this is a care focus, relationship based care focus that touches everybody in the family. And what we see is 50 to 60% of team members will make substantial use of the service in a one year period.

Josh 15:01

Well, I am a believer that. The company I was blessed to work with in the first nine years of my career made substantial investments into chaplain care in each of our communities. And not only was I a recipient of that benefit. But also I saw the result of having my team members have the result of that benefit. And I can remember talking a little bit about dealing with life issues. Very seldom did me and I remember his name David, and chaplain David was such a great caring man. So kind to me and my family, but I remember most of our conversations didn't even revolve around work. I can remember him showing up I had two children in that time and he was one of the first ones at the hospital to say, congratulations and the bond that you build.

Josh

And I can tell you that was always very refreshing me and my team the residents and, and quite frankly, their families would so look forward to the calls and the visits that we would get. And the funny thing is that relationship actually carried on long past even when the resident would pass. I can remember, and I don't know if you guys have experienced this too, but there would actually be a celebration Memorial that they would come back. And so all the residents that had passed the chaplain would have known them many times, even more than the pastor that they had been going to, maybe the church or the congregation for a long time, the families and the residents would request the chaplain to do the, the ceremonies at the passing and special ceremony events. So it was just really cool. And I'm sure your chaplains probably experienced that as well, but just the life bond that you get that ties people to the culture of that community is really special.

John Milesen 17:12

That's so well said, Josh. Helping people with grief and helping them in the joys of life, extraordinary privilege. And the only way that that privilege takes place and that care gets delivered is when senior living company owners and operators catch this vision and invite this kind of connection. We officiate many funerals. We officiate and lead many memorial services right on site. Either in the moment just after the passing or shortly after. And even if the invitation to serve is for the team members only. We offer that Memorial service for team members that may have passed as well as residents that may have passed because everybody in the community gets affected by the grief of that loss. These caregiving professionals who are serving those residents love those residents, and they're dealing with grief all the time. And so helping them with their grief, helping the family members of the one who's passed makes a tremendous difference in terms of the genuine care and love expressed in that community.

Josh 18:29

I totally agree. Well, Lucas I really think we talk about culture change in our industry a lot. And I really believe this is a key ingredient to caring for the total person, not just the resident, but your team

members. And we know that you gotta care for the team members first, before they can ever provide appropriate care. We've talked about that a lot on the show. And, and I think people in general are starting to talk more about that. What a cool concept, right?

Lucas 19:02

I wholeheartedly agree. And I'm shocked that we are just now talking about this topic on the bridge of gap network. As I'm hearing this, as we understand how complex senior living is, and then when you add in end of life situations, and the caregiver burnout. To me, this seems like not an afterthought, but a front thought that needs to be, that needs to be talked about within the industry and what a help that this could be particularly on the labor force that is struggling so deeply right now. I think that we could all use a visit from the chaplain. I need John to come and talk to my kids next week here to come and help here at my house. So I just think that this is a fantastic conversation. I think it's one that needs to be had and what a great way to care holistically for something that is very complex and very heavy, oftentimes to bring this extra support. I couldn't be more a fan of this type of service.

Josh 20:14

Well, John, thanks for taking time away from actually your care duties and spending time with me and Lucas on this show. Sharing some insight with our listeners. I know they're going to want to connect with you and Lucas. We're definitely gonna connect with them on our platform.

Lucas 20:36

Absolutely. We will make sure that we connect with John and his team. You can go to [BTGvoice.com](https://www.btgvoice.com), download this episode, read the transcript, connect with us on social and connect with John as well. Continue the conversation on our LinkedIn page or on Instagram. Thanks for listening to another great episode of Bridge the Gap.