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Senior living care sees dramatic shortage of workers

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A conference during a recent symposium submitted



Doug Olson

If college-age students' interest in working within senior living services continues to decline, 10 to 20 years from now there won't be enough workers to take care of those in senior living communities.

“If staffing keeps declining the prices of these communities are going to skyrocket because there's going to be so much need and not enough care. Also quality of care would suffer,” said Riley Tagatz, a Western Kentucky University health care administration graduate.

Vision Centre is a nonprofit organization that is working to bridge the gap that exists between academics and senior living providers. It is helping universities provide academic programs to educate students and field experiences that will prepare them to enter the workforce.



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“We need to reframe how we talk about this field. That's part of what the Vision Centre is about, reframing the conversation,” said Vision Centre CEO Doug Olson.

Many students don't consider this career. The conversations that surround long-term care are typically negative.

“I think that there's a stigma against old people and getting old and I think that doesn't really help when it comes to staffing,” Tagatz said.

“There's this impression that nursing homes are so depressing, and people are miserable and don't want to be there. In my experience, that could not be further from the truth. These residents will tell you their life story.

They've done things cooler than I'll ever do. I think that there's a lot of misconceptions out there.”

Senior care is a broad spectrum – home- and community-based services, assisted living, independent living communities, skilled nursing and hospice.

“I think we need to do a whole lot more. One of the reasons we're working with all the different universities is we think that people should find this profession earlier. It shouldn't be by chance,” Olson said. “One of the things that we found is once people find it (senior care), they love it. It provides a great opportunity.”



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Many college-aged students might not be aware of this profession and the opportunities it provides. Most people who study health care administration are typically more interested in the hospital or clinical side of things rather than long-term care. Vision Centre is working to change this.

The field has a community impact and the pay is more than a recent college graduate might expect.

“Field experiences probably varies anywhere from \$25,000 to \$50,000, depending upon the place ... I think starting salaries can be anywhere from \$60,000 to \$100,000, depending upon where you go,” Olson said.

Field experiences include internships, administrator in training and fellowship or residency programs. Internships are typically done by students or recent graduates while a fellowship/residency is completed by those working on graduate degrees.

“You've got 100 residents, 100 employees and your budget's probably \$10 million. That's a significant responsibility,” Olson said. “I think this next generation is going to knock it out of the park because they're motivated. I'll talk to administrators (who say) ‘I got so many different things going on every day’ and I talk to new people going in the field and they love to multitask ... three or four or five o'clock goes around, you've never even looked at the clock. They're exciting positions, meaningful positions.”

By 2025, Vision Centre hopes to create 25 strong academic programs, 1,000 paid field experiences and significantly expand its partnerships with universities and senior living providers.

For more information regarding
Vision Centre and its mission, visit
visioncentre.org.

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