



Qualitätstriathlon
im Pflegealltag

Best Practices in Elder Care: Exploring New Approaches

An Interview with Monika Schmechel,
Director of Haus Carolin, Römergarten Residences in Offenbach



The method for quality management was developed in the industry. You showed a lot of pioneering spirit by applying it in your facility. What were your expectations?

Our expectations for the training were quite simple: The staff should become aware of the importance of the audit of our facility by the MDK, the Medical Service of the German Public Health Insurance Authority. They should enjoy learning the content, acquire and apply it, and continuously use it in their work areas.

Continuously means that you are still working on it?

Exactly, we have installed dashboards to list all deviations from the required quality standards. We're doing the triathlon, which includes identifying deviations and deficiencies and solving problems. This has proven to be very effective. To ensure that the learning is sustainable, everything is documented and worked through. However, I must admit that in December, during the peak season for senior homes, this somewhat fell by the wayside.

But we still continue to use the card game during the morning handover time when the early and late shifts change, so when many employees are present. Cards are drawn, and the learning content and questions are asked to the staff. This helps us to continuously learn and achieve high sustainability.

I always appreciate the training from IP-International. Simply because we continually get new staff in our senior facilities. We have what we call "upgradings," meaning higher care levels. This also means we can bring in more staff. For 2017, we have 29 new employees in full-time and part-time positions. The knowledge gained from the training needs to be continuously reintroduced. Colleagues also do this, but it's always better when an external person imparts the knowledge.

...it sounds very good at first that the long-standing employees pass their knowledge on to the new ones...

Yes, that is indeed the case. The twice-conducted training by IP-International has had a lasting impact on the core staff. It has proven effective. However, it's necessary to continually remind and reinforce the training to maintain its sustainability. I can only recommend this to supervisors and management. Training sessions where knowledge is conveyed in a playful manner continuously sensitizes the employees.

In developing the learning game, it was important that you, as an expert, reviewed it once more. To a layperson, distinctions like "administering a medication" and "dispensing a medication" might not be immediately clear. What did you like most about the final version of the game?

It was quite simple: Watching the different groups or working teams that had formed compete against each other. This doesn't mean that there was any disparagement of the group that scored fewer points. On the contrary, teams supported each other across boundaries.

Most importantly, the staff really enjoyed it. It was very different from a dry training session. The atmosphere was lively, and wherever there is liveliness, especially in the care sector, the content is absorbed by the employees much better and faster. The acceptance of these important and legally required aspects is significantly higher.

The groups were arranged so that no single department, which usually works together, competed against the others. Instead, they were deliberately mixed, including people from various residential areas and professional roles.

It was crucial and purposeful to convey that we are one team throughout the entire facility because we always need to help each other across different residential areas. We have three residential areas. Naturally, each employee is assigned to a specific area. However, particularly during the winter months, there are often illness-related absences, and employees need to know exactly how things operate in other areas. Now, they can immediately work in a different area because our structures have changed. We have now standardized our procedures to 99% across the entire facility.

Can you determine if the work environment has improved?

The work environment has significantly improved after the second training session with Ms. Schoch from IP-International. Collegiality, teamwork, and cross-departmental support among colleagues are now completely seamless. The training emphasized that we are one team in the facility, even though we work across three residential areas. Employees have learned more than ever that having continuity and a uniform structure makes it much easier to step into another area, as everything is clearly defined. This has provided employees with a great sense of security.

One of IP-International's intentions was also for all employees to better understand what their colleagues in other areas are doing. Has this been achieved?

Yes, that is correct. We have created a high level of transparency for the various professional groups. This has significantly improved the acceptance of other roles—whether it's housekeeping, cleaning, building maintenance, care, or the kitchen. People have gained a different perspective. This has greatly enhanced collegiality. Previously, there was often a perception of: "What do they do all day? They don't do much." But once you engage with colleagues from other professional groups, you realize that they also carry a lot of responsibility, not just those of us in care.

How did your employees react when you announced another training session? Was there willingness or more concern about an additional burden?

No, our employees do not see training as an additional burden at all, especially since there are many trainings, continuing education, and instructions required by law in elder care. Our staff here is always very motivated after training sessions, and this motivation lasts for a long time.

There were no resistance from the employees. On the contrary, about half of the staff had already attended a training session with Ms. Schoch before. Since that first training had sparked great enthusiasm, the core staff encouraged the new employees to join in. Additionally, as mentioned, there is a mandatory requirement for continuing education in senior care facilities.

Have you received positive feedback from your employees regarding your personal commitment?

Yes, definitely. Especially from the new employees, some said, "The work you put into rephrasing the MDK questions—the basis for the training—is incredible! Now we finally understand the legislation. We had transformed the difficult bureaucratic language into 'employee language' without diluting the statements.

Do employees now perceive the management level of the facility differently after the training? Do they see you not just as the boss who delegates but also as a consultant who supports and helps them and guides them? Has this changed the relationship between manager and employee?

Yes. My acceptance, or that of the care service management, is now very high. Previously, we had to mention various things two or three times, but now they are handled directly by the staff after just one instruction.



Seniorenresidenz Haus Carolin

Regarding job satisfaction: This can be measured by factors such as absenteeism and employee turnover. Have there been any observations in these areas?

Yes, although job satisfaction involves many other factors. This cannot be attributed solely to the IPInternational training. We have a very employee-friendly company here. We have adjusted working hours, and with over 80 employees, we have only about 300 overtime hours. Stable duty rosters are crucial for every employee when they know exactly when their shift ends. And reliability from supervisors is highly valued by every employee in this facility.

In your opinion, can the quality triathlon from IP-International be applied to other senior care facilities as well? Would you recommend it?

Definitely. However, it is always dependent on the organization. Some organizations are entrenched in very rigid structures (I won't name names). The larger an organization is, the more inflexible it tends to be, and the less willingness there is for improvement. Employees may be treated merely as personnel numbers with assigned duties.

However, Römergarten Residences places a high value on employee satisfaction and continuity, keeping turnover low and ensuring that employees are somewhat at the center of focus, while not forgetting the residents. And—as mentioned—employee training is only meaningful if it is continuously maintained afterward.

Your goal was to increase the satisfaction of your employees, residents, and their families. Do you see this confirmed?

Yes, definitely. Employees now have a completely different level of interaction with both the residents and their families. Often, the families are much less understanding and more difficult than the individuals we care for here. Our residents are certainly very satisfied, but the families often have demands that could only be met in a five-star hotel. However, we are a senior care facility. I think everything needs to remain on a "normal" level.

There's no question that Römergarten Residences is somewhat different. It is the absolute alternative to traditional nursing homes. We have a bit of a hotel character, but we cannot deepen that aspect further due to limited financial resources and possibilities.

Dear Ms. Schmechel, thank you very much for the conversation, and respect for your great commitment to valuing your employees, which ultimately benefits your residents!



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