

RHarper Consulting Update

Construction Fatigue – How Do We Avoid It?

Having been involved in some major senior housing campus repositionings during the past decade one often overlooked aspect has been the toll construction wreaks on a campus. This is especially true in renovations of existing buildings. Frequent and extended utility interruptions, noise from demolition and chipping operations, relocation of parking lots, and the dust associated with these projects all have a cumulative effect upon the quality of life of our most important stakeholders.

Obviously, some construction disruptions are unavoidable, but we often overlook ways we might mitigate their impacts. Here are a few thoughts borne from my experience:

- **Communication** – Beginning with initial planning bring residents and staff to the table and listen to their concerns. Provide frequent resident and staff educational sessions as the design process proceeds. During construction hold weekly resident meetings with the project team, schedule frequent “hard hat” tours, and host parties to celebrate milestone events. At each of these be sure to acknowledge the sacrifices residents and staff have endured and express appreciation for it. When something goes wrong, communication is even more critical. Let everyone know immediately as information becomes available and provide frequent updates until conditions return to normal and have the project team “own” the problem and its consequences.
- **Pre-construction planning** – Usually our overriding concerns during pre-construction are budgets and schedules. We often ignore the impacts to resident life from our construction activities. Assume planned work hours don’t start until residents are generally awake and moving. Where possible perform selective demolition to determine utility and structural locations. Schedule any planned utility interruptions for overnight hours where possible.
- **Weekly Scheduling Meetings** – The construction team and staff should meet weekly to discuss the upcoming activities that may disrupt the residents. Staff may plan offsite activities for days when construction may be particularly annoying. The construction team must instill in their subcontractors that utility service interruptions must be scheduled in advance.
- **Safe access** – When working in occupied buildings, the construction team must make sure residents cannot wander into construction spaces at any time. Where memory care residents are on the premises all doors must always be actively controlled. Propping open doors by construction personnel must be prohibited.
- **Resident Safety** – While working in an occupied building all workers must be constantly aware of resident safety concerns. When working in active corridors on ladders workers should be “coning off” the area and have a helper at the bottom of the ladder to prevent resident conflicts. Movement of construction materials or debris in corridors must be strictly controlled and monitored.

Whenever we are working on a senior housing campus, we are working in our residents’ homes. Their tolerance for disruptions in their home is a finite resource just like dollars and time. It is our responsibility to budget this resource as we do any other. We all know unexpected events are going to occur during the construction process that will impact our residents. By planning and minimizing the effects of our planned activities, we will have more capacity for the unplanned ones.

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RHarper Consulting Group provides development consulting, program management, and owner representation services focused on the senior living and mixed use sectors. In addition, Mr. Harper is also a listed mediator and arbitrator providing dispute resolution services for the construction and real estate industries.