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AUBREY HORD

MARY LESTER

Meet vice president of operations at Vivia by Hookele Home Care



Registered nurse Mary Lester has served as vice president of operations for Vivia by Hookele Home Care since 2016, where she oversees about 45 certified nurse aides and nurse assistants, among other staff, on Maui. Her team, called Hookele Caregivers Maui, serves approximately 140 seniors on the Valley Isle.

Lester, who dreamed of becoming a nurse since childhood, earned her bachelor's in nursing at Bellingham Technical College in Washington. Her early career path included positions on a medical-surgical

unit and as a traveling nurse on the Mainland. Later, Lester worked at the rehabilitation/critical access unit at Kula Hospital, where she treated post-stroke, diabetic and geriatric patients – her first introduction to senior care.

In addition to her work, she volunteers as a member of both the Aging Life Care Association and the Sepsis Alliance.

Lester told Pacific Business News by email more about launching Vivia by Hookele Home Care on Maui, including her approach to building capacity, staff and a client base.

What was your experience starting Hookele Home Care

“The main attribute that I look for in a staff member is heart. Caring for our kupuna is not just a job.”

MARY LESTER,
RN and VP of operations

operations on Maui? Building Hookele Caregivers Maui from the ground up was challenging but at the same time extremely rewarding. I learned so much from my time working at Kula hospital but knew I wanted to branch out and be able to make a difference in the lives of kupuna throughout the island. With the help of the Hale Makua Foundation and our Hookele Oahu administration, I was able to create opportunities and build relationships within our community. Becoming an active, visible member of the community took time, but the effort made delivering quality care possible, and with our high-quality staff, we built a reputation as a very caring and “small town” feel company who truly cared about our clients and staff.

One thing that I love about Hookele is that we do our best to prevent seniors from “falling through the cracks” of the health care system, and this is why we partner with the Maui County Office on Aging, The Veterans Administration and with Quest Medicaid programs. It is important to us to keep our kupuna aging in place and to keep aging in place as affordable and accessible as possible.

Another goal is to alleviate caregiver burnout. We want our kupuna’s primary caregivers and loved ones to be able to step back and just be a son or daughter, wife or husband. We offer respite care services to families to help take the burden of being the main source of support off their shoulders, so that they can focus on the relationship with their loved one and can take care of themselves as well.

What are your top recruitment and retention strategies for nursing professions on Maui? What motivates your nursing staff to come into work? The main attribute that I look for in a staff member is heart. Caring for our kupuna is not just a job. We can teach our staff caregiver skills, but you cannot teach the caring nature that one must have to be by a senior’s side as they lose their independence little by little and treat them with compassion. Our caregivers treat each senior client as a person and can engage and

make the interactions enjoyable for both the kupuna and our staff. The caregivers that we have on staff often refer friends or past colleagues to join our team as they know that it is a great place to work.

One thing about Hookele Caregivers Maui is we are a team. We know that without our staff, we wouldn't be who we are today. We treat our staff with dignity and respect, we make sure that they understand that we are there for them.

How are you/your staff preparing for the "Silver Tsunami" (population aging)? With the shortage of nurse's aides in Hawaii combined with an increase in seniors needing care, we were well aware that the math just wouldn't add up. We had to think "outside the box" when it came to staffing. This creative thinking resulted in our Vivia Cares program. In the Vivia care model, a caregiver is employed full-time, provided with a company vehicle, receives a higher wage and travels to assist a neighborhood of clients in a set geographical area. With this method, a Vivia assistant can care for 15 to 20 clients a week for shorter, more frequent visits.

With our Vivia model, clients and their families only pay for care tasks that they need. There are no minimum number of hours that a family must buy. This is different from the traditional model of home care, where caregivers would stay with a senior client for four-to-eight hours a day when all they really needed was someone to assist them with a shower.

Our Vivia clients and their families have been creative in deciding on tasks that they need and want, and the frequency of caregiver visits. This helps families to stay within their budgets while getting the care that they need. This also assists our kupuna in feeling like they have some say in how they are aging in their homes. We can still provide the longer hours of care for seniors requiring more traditional care, but our Vivia program is helping us address some of the care challenges of the "Silver Tsunami."

SENIOR CARE

Survey says Hawaii is well staffed

A survey by online resource Seniorly ranked Hawaii as the No. 13 best state nationwide for senior care staffing in 2024.

Data was derived between 2022 and 2024 from the U.S. Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Census Bureau and Kaiser Family Foundation.

"Senior care facilities remain 120,000 staffers short of early 2020 levels, according to the American Healthcare Association, and after analyzing 14,717 nursing homes, [The Journal of the American Medical Association] found substantial evidence linking staffing levels to quality of care," Seniorly noted. "As a record 4.1 million Americans turn 65 in 2024 – in what is being called the 'Silver Tsunami' – families should seek well-staffed facilities."

Here are key metrics from the study, which led to Hawaii's ranking:

- ▶ Hawaii was among the states with lowest nursing staff turnover in nursing homes: **39.7%** median staff turnover rate (No. 2 in the nation, behind Washington, D.C., 37.8%)
- ▶ **Two** nurses per occupied bed (No. 5 in the nation)
- ▶ **83.3%** nursing home occupancy rates (No. 27 in the nation).

To view the full study, including methodology, go to: bizj.us/1ql1x9.

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"When *I* is replaced by *We*, even *Illness* becomes *Wellness*."

- Malcom X



CELEBRATING NURSES WEEK

May 6 - 12, 2024



At Maui Health, we are constantly inspired by our staff and the exceptional care they provide for our communities on Maui and Lanai.

In recognition of Nurses Week, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated Maui Health 'ohana, who selflessly serve and care for our community. We are so grateful for the incredible work that they do each and every day.

Join our celebration by sharing words of appreciation for our caregivers at:

mauihealth.org/mahalo

Maui Memorial Medical Center
Maui Memorial Outpatient Clinic
Maui Wound Care and Hyperbaric Therapy
Kula Hospital and Clinic
Lāna'i Community Hospital

PEOPLE. COMMUNITY. EXCELLENCE.

