AUTHOR

Ken Congden

Editor In Chief

Healthcare Technology Online

Innovation Corner:

Overcome Healthcare Chaos with Advanced Scheduling Technology

For many healthcare facilities, staff scheduling poses several unique and overwhelming challenges. For example, managers must take into account employee skill sets, specialties, certifications, seniority and shift preferences when slating a staff schedule. Plus, since many healthcare facilities are 24/7 operations with ever-changing staffing requirements, dynamic scheduling changes are often required that must weigh criteria such as the overtime eligibility and rest periods of each employee. The sheer number of variables that need to be calculated can make it difficult and time consuming for healthcare management to perform scheduling tasks manually. Luckily, advanced scheduling software is available that can track and weigh these variables, make staffing suggestions based on available criteria, and automate much of the scheduling workflow. Advanced scheduling software is not a new phenomenon, but research suggests that the technology has only penetrated approximately 40 percent of the healthcare market. However, factors including the weak economy, dwindling profit margins and increasing labor costs are driving more healthcare organizations to evaluate these scheduling tools.

THE BENEFITS OF ADVANCED SCHEDULING SOLUTIONS

Advanced scheduling software can provide a healthcare facility with several benefits when implemented and used correctly. First, scheduling applications can help reduce labor costs by enabling managers to minimize overtime expenses and reduce the use of costly outside agency personnel. Advanced scheduling applications provide up-to-date information on how many hours each employee has worked, what their hourly rate is, their overtime eligibility, and how many hours they'll work during the remainder of the pay period. This information helps healthcare providers identify the employee that will best fits the staffing need, but also costs the least to work the shift. Furthermore, the software can help managers identify internal employees that are available for a shift before they secure outside agency support. Internal staff availability is oftentimes miscalculated or overlooked in a manual scheduling environment and outside agency personnel are typically twice as expensive as internal workers.

Second, advanced scheduling software can improve productivity by eliminating manual scheduling processes and simplifying information exchange between managers and employees. Managers that use scheduling applications become more productive because they can access a wide variety of information about their employees (e.g. certifications, shift preferences, hourly rates, etc.) electronically from a single location.

Finally, advanced scheduling technologies can help improve patient care by reducing employee turnover and reliance on external caregivers. Scheduling solutions help make day-to-day operations more predictable and enable employees to more actively balance their professional and personal lives. This makes for happier employees and less turnover. Furthermore, a tenured staff ensures that a consistent level of care is provided to your patients.

BALANCE EASE OF USE, REPORTING WHEN SELECTING A SCHEDULING PLATFORM

If you're thinking of investing in an advanced scheduling solution for your healthcare facility, it's important to evaluate several products thoroughly. Furthermore, you will want to include head nurses, office managers, human

resources personnel, finance managers, and IT employees in the evaluation process. All of these employees will have an interest in how the scheduling software will perform and integrate with other systems. Feedback from all of these parties should be considered before making a final selection, and don't be surprised if this feedback varies widely between employees. For example, in a recent study by KLAS titled "Staff Scheduling: Nurses Rock The Boat" a significant gap was identified between the scheduling software favored by nurses and those preferred by finance and IT departments. The report indicated that nurses favor scheduling applications with interfaces that are easy to use and manage while finance and IT departments care more about the reporting and integration capabilities of a product. Since the product you choose must meet the needs of all these parties, the nurses' or office managers' feedback may prove to be the most influential considering that these are the folks that will need to use the application day-in and day-out. If they aren't happy with the way a product performs, adoption may be a difficult proposition and all the other benefits the solution promises may be for naught.

Content courtesy of Healthcare Technology Online
www.healthcaretechnologyonline.com.