

Simplifying Scheduling: Solutions to Optimize Productivity and Employee Quality of Life

BY TERRI SCHEXNAYDER

In an American Nurses Association survey of almost 220,000 registered nurses from 13,000 nursing units in more than 550 hospitals, nurses reported a troubling situation: During the previous year, 43 percent of all RNs had worked overtime because the unit was short-staffed or busy. These staffing challenges affected unit admissions, transfers and discharges more than 20 percent of the time.

Providing exceptional patient care is the primary mission at San Angelo Community Medical Center, and making sure patients are in the hands of a highly qualified and passionate nursing staff is a top priority. Chief Nursing Officer Cecil Jameson, RN, recalled some of the staffing challenges the hospital has addressed.

“Our situation was typical of most hospitals. In order to find good, qualified staff, we were depending on agency support, which can be very expensive,” said Jameson. “We wanted to reduce these costs, encourage more people to work at our hospital, and incentivize our staff to pick up open shifts.”

The hospital found some of its solutions in software offered by Concerro, a company that specializes in Internet-connected scheduling programs for the health care industry.



A Collaborative Approach to Scheduling

The first step for SACMC was to provide a way for managers to quickly create unit schedules and easily fill their open shifts. By implementing a Web-based scheduling system, managers had the ability to create their schedules online and post open shifts to all qualified staff. Nurses, meanwhile, could view open shifts from the comfort of their own home and request to fill any shift for which they were qualified. As the scheduling process became more transparent and accessible, it resulted in greater satisfaction among staff members and gave them a stronger sense of control. The program helped break down silos and provided a collaborative approach to staffing across the hospital.

The service is based on individual employee profiles, and the system only displays the shifts that each nurse is qualified to work. Any nurses who want to pick up extra shifts have complete access to all open shifts for which they are qualified, ensuring fairness and consistency in the scheduling process.

Reaping the Rewards

Next, the hospital tackled its incentives program to help increase employee satisfaction while reducing costs. By using merchandise rewards, employees are motivated to help fill vacant shifts. Similar to a frequent-flier program, points are accumulated for filling open shifts. Employees can redeem these points through a catalog for a variety of items, including iPods, sports equipment and gift cards.

Employees can rack up points quickly. For example, if a nurse works 12 extra hours a week at SACMC, she will earn 1,200 points. Weekend shifts earn double points. Perfect attendance at the end of the quarter results in 10,000 reward points. Jameson said staff members have been pleased with the program.

“We used to give nurses a stipend for additional shifts,” said Jameson. “Now, 5,000 points result in a \$25 gift card. Our employees love it and mention to me all

the time how they save up their points for Christmas gifts or family birthdays.”

Excellence in Staffing

SACMC’s new scheduling and open shift management system supports the hospital’s overall commitment to achieve excellence in staffing, offering advantages to nurses as well as other hospital stakeholders. The program encourages cross-unit activity enterprise-wide. For example, a medical-surgical nurse who had experience with labor and delivery prior to his employment at the hospital can keep his skills updated by taking on additional shifts at the hospital.

Jameson also noted that because these are easy-to-use, the programs foster high user adoption. With 249 licensed nurses on its hospital staff of 831 employees, SACMC has benefited in many ways from this solution.

“In addition to reducing agency costs, we now fill our shifts more expeditiously and have increased satisfaction among our nurses,” said Jameson.

For more information about Concerro, contact Keith Wagstaff at kwagstaff@concerro.com or 210/347-7425 or go to www.concerro.com. *