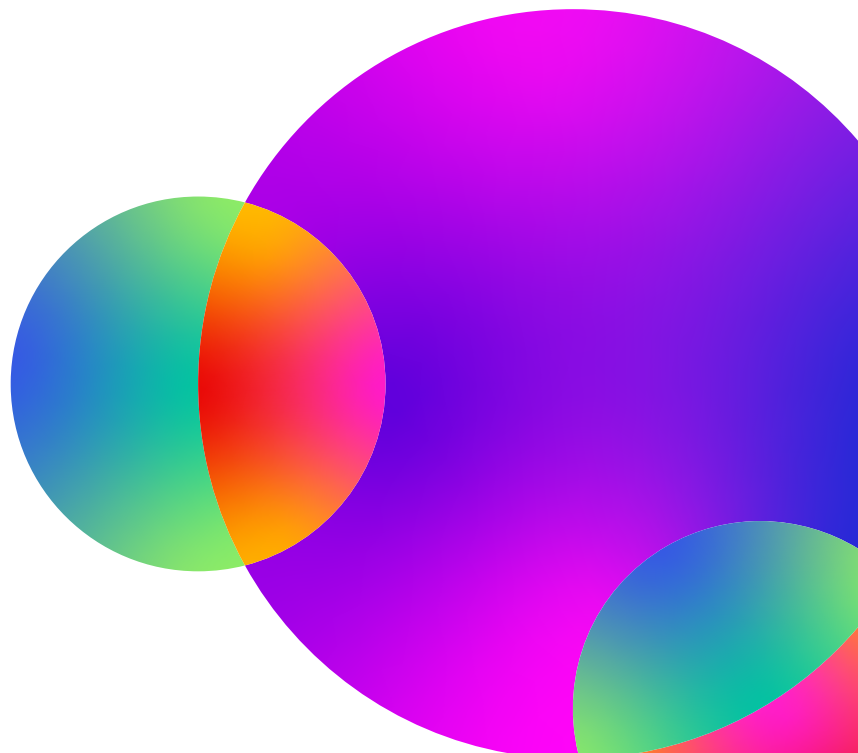


# Beyond Nursing

An Enterprise-wide Approach:  
How Health Systems are Using Staffing and Scheduling  
Solutions to Optimize Their Entire Workforce





The changing dynamics and shift to a new normal in healthcare have healthcare organizations of all shapes and sizes focused on strategies to optimize their workforce. Whether it's in a single hospital or in a large health system, on average the healthcare workforce accounts for more than 54% of operating costs.<sup>1</sup> Because many health systems have suffered large financial losses, many organizations are taking a closer look at how automated staffing and scheduling solutions can help reduce labor costs and increase the productivity of their workforce.

Because nursing generally represents the largest single component of the health system workforce, many organizations focus their efforts only on this specific group. However, almost 50% of the workforce is comprised of non-clinicians and support staff.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, health systems are missing out on realizing the full potential of their technology investment. Instead, an enterprise-wide implementation into ancillary and support services departments maximizes the benefits the organization can realize.

Workforce optimization challenges in healthcare are similar from organization to organization, and they apply to all employees regardless of department, role or responsibility. Overtime and premium labor expenditures can impact any department with non-exempt employees. All employees can call in sick, request paid time off (PTO), or work overtime, and employee satisfaction applies across the board, not just within nursing departments.

Every single employee in a hospital or health system plays a role in achieving business and financial goals. Whether an emergency department technician, nurse, housekeeper, or medical receptionist, each employee impacts the patient experience, the bottom line and the success of the organization.



## Nursing and Beyond

It makes sense to begin implementation of an integrated staffing and scheduling system with the largest group, the nursing staff. Nurse staffing practices play a vital role in ensuring that care quality and financial goals are met. However, challenges such as high overtime, premium labor costs and compliance with union regulations impact entire organizations, not just nursing departments. In fact, some of the best labor-related cost savings, and compliance and regulatory measures are realized through more efficient use of ancillary and support services labor.

At Spectrum Health, the majority of staff using the scheduling solution are nurses; however, the greatest number of cost centers using the staffing and scheduling solution are non-inpatient nursing areas. The technology has streamlined staffing and scheduling throughout the entire health system and provided all staff standardized processes for self-scheduling, requesting open shifts and making schedule trades.

According to Jane Scharmer, Staffing Systems Administrator at Spectrum Health, *“The automated tools have empowered our staff to gain control over their work/life balance and enabled our organization to increase productivity and control labor costs.”*

*“Visibility into the staffing needs across our system has made it possible to share staff as appropriate and assists our specialized resource centers in assigning staff efficiently. Managers benefit from the reporting and can make decisions about PTO vacation time with ease.”*



## Optimizing Productivity and Labor Spend

A critical component to improving workforce optimization is visibility. Not just departmental visibility, but big-picture visibility throughout the whole organization. The most effective staffing and scheduling technologies provide data on important measures like staffing gaps, overtime, labor spend and productivity.

At Duke University Health System, automated staffing and scheduling tools provide easy visibility into data regarding which facilities, units and shifts each staff member is qualified to work, making it possible to meet patient care needs cost effectively.

According to Julia Bambach, Duke University Health System Strategic Services Associate, *“Deployment of automated staffing and scheduling was required in our inpatient nursing units. However, after seeing their success, we received a number of proactive requests to implement the solution in our ancillary and support services departments.”*

*“Our ancillary departments, including hospital and external primary care clinics employ more non-nursing roles than nurses, including positions such as phlebotomists, patient service associates and dieticians. Of the 142 departments using the solution, 65% are ancillary or support services departments with the balance of 35% being inpatient nursing units. Pharmacy, bed control, respiratory therapy, physical therapy and occupational therapy, among other departments, are now all benefiting from improved workforce outcomes including more cost effective scheduling, and reduced incidental overtime.”*

In all groups at Duke University Health System, clinical and non-clinical, managers have access to scheduling reports and are better able to identify challenges such as unexcused absence trends and incidental overtime. The enterprise-wide implementation of staffing and scheduling technology has created a more equitable and consistent scheduling process, which has also improved employee morale.





## Sharing Resources Across Departments and Facilities

While nurses are critical to achieving quality patient care, there are other specialties that also have an impact on meeting care quality goals. Broad use of an automated staffing and scheduling solution makes it easier to get the right person in the right place at the right time, regardless of whether those resources are nurses or other members of the care team.

While managing day-to-day operations, the ability to efficiently share resources has an impact on providing high quality patient care. At the Northeast Georgia Physicians Group (NGPG) – part of the Northeast Georgia Health System, representing more than 200 physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners – empowering managers to staff shifts with the right people is a priority. Insight from their staffing and scheduling solution has enabled the organization to share resources to fill open shifts, dramatically improving scheduling efficiencies.

According to Bobby Norris, NGPG Director, “Our staffing and scheduling technology allows us to leverage information from employee profiles and identify which staff meets a particular shift’s qualifications. Having access and visibility into this information has helped ensure open shifts are filled with the right employees in the most efficient way possible to meet the needs of our patients.”



## Better Management of Open Shifts

Changes in census, PTO and unscheduled absences can create staffing challenges for all groups, not just nurses. Filling open shifts, especially at the last minute, is particularly challenging and can be nearly impossible without the right technology. Deployment of a single staffing and scheduling solution across the entire organization not only increases the pool of available staff to fill open shifts, but for organizations that leverage self-scheduling or incentive tools, it enables employees to be more engaged and proactive in the scheduling process.

Having staffing and scheduling implemented throughout Southern Illinois Healthcare provides a picture of the entire workforce and insight into critical employee data such as hours worked, experience, expertise and when the employee is expected to enter overtime. This empowers managers to respond immediately, filling open shifts more quickly and efficiently, enabling the whole organization to run more smoothly.

According to Karen Shaw, Southern Illinois Healthcare Functional System Administrator, “Regardless of department, if a staff member is scheduled for vacation, our staffing and scheduling system provides the right kind of data that allows managers not only to view who is available to fill the gap from other departments, but also see volumes and determine whether or not it makes sense to fill the shift based upon the expected need.”



## Regulatory and Policy Compliance

Staffing legislation, wage and hour laws, and union regulations can create scheduling complexities across the entire organization. Often, expansion into ancillary and support services departments is motivated by outcomes achieved in nursing departments after the deployment of staffing and scheduling technology. Because non-nursing departments encounter many of the same challenges as nursing areas, they are interested in duplicating the success within their own groups.

According to Shaw, "At our three hospitals and medical groups, implementation began with the nursing department then expanded organically to the rest of the organization when managers were able to see the benefits of the solution in action, specifically more efficient deployment and sharing of staff. Broader implementation of staffing and scheduling technology brought these same benefits to more than 60 groups."

"This provided nearly every department in our organization with the staffing and scheduling tools necessary to improve productivity and make sure we are in compliance with regulations and policies," said Shaw. "We are now able to proactively manage complex requirements that affect patient and employee safety such as staffing ratios and certifications that are supported with documentation and reports."

Regardless of how many facilities or the number of employees, union, regulatory and internal policy requirements can create a daunting and complex situation for any healthcare organization. Automated staffing and scheduling has the potential to standardize the application of scheduling rules as well as internal and external policies for every department and group, while accommodating the variability in requirements between departments and union contract obligations.





## Conclusion

In this highly competitive marketplace where budgets are tight and high quality patient care is an imperative, forward-thinking organizations understand that comprehensive workforce management strategies that apply to every department and group are key to long-term organizational sustainability. With labor costs accounting for the biggest piece of the operating budget, implementation of an automated staffing and scheduling system for all employees is the first step to bringing costs under control.

By reducing the amount of manual, time-consuming administrative tasks, managers and supervisors spend less time on cumbersome processes, and more time doing the job they were hired to do. Employees benefit from having more control over their schedule, which improves satisfaction and increases accountability. Healthcare is about treating and caring for patients, and though not every employee is directly responsible for delivery of clinical care, every employee can make an impact on the organization's business goals.

## References

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