

Staffing for Meaningful Use

The 2010 announcement of \$30 billion in government stimulus money for healthcare providers who implement Electronic Medical/Healthcare Records (EMR/EHR) solutions in their organizations has created a modern gold rush in the healthcare industry.

In order to qualify for funds, a practice must make “Meaningful Use” of EMR/EHR solutions over a five-year period. The industry is now highly motivated to achieve Meaningful Use, and most facilities are busily engaged in the process of mobilizing their site so that they can cash in on the ARRA stimulus package.

In fact, according to the 21st Annual HIMSS Leadership Survey, 59 percent of respondents reported that they were going to make IT investments in order to qualify for ARRA incentives. But that same study also reported that “Lack of Adequate Staffing Resources” was cited as the number one barrier to achieving Meaningful Use.

What’s more, Meaningful Use requirements themselves do not necessarily create operational efficiencies once in place. What does that mean for an industry that is already plagued with staffing shortages and high turnover?

Whether you’re diving into Meaningful Use planning head first or taking a more cautious approach, it is critical to consider the long-term effects such a plan will have on your organization, and take steps now to ensure the plan’s continued success. As highlighted by the HIMSS survey, staffing is the most critical element of your long-term Meaningful Use plan. Addressing staffing issues now will save time and money both in the short-term and as you put your Meaningful Use plans in place for the future.

Staffing is already tight and it is expected to get worse

Today, there is already a high demand for talented healthcare staff. Staff shortages and high turnover plague the industry, compromising patient care and cutting into profit margins. State regulations and union contracts are also adding to the crunch by mandating minimum staff to patient ratios and raising a hospital’s liability if they fail to comply. Meaningful Use requirements will not only increase this demand, they will also increase the baseline skill level required of employees who work in a facility that has EMR/HER systems in place.

At the same time, the U.S. and Canada are suffering a nursing shortage that is only expected to get worse in the coming years, as more nurses retire and fewer nurses graduate from qualified programs. The extra burden this places on nurses negatively impacts job satisfaction and leads to high turnover. These factors create a significant challenge as hospitals work to attract and retain quality nursing talent.

Another consideration is cost. Hiring and training new staff is already expensive; hiring new staff that is qualified to work on EMR/EHR systems and training them to work with your particular system will be even more costly, making staff retention an even more important goal.

As you can see, the smart strategy, both short- and long-term, is to hire the best staff and keep them happy so that they stay in their jobs.

Improve job satisfaction and lower turnover with intelligent staffing solutions

Increasing retention of valuable staff resources is the first step in maintaining Meaningful Use standards, improving patient care and lowering costs. What's the most effective way to lower turnover? Consider this: healthcare workers rate being assigned the schedule they want as their highest job satisfaction criteria. Providing stability and flexibility in the scheduling process gives nurses and other staff a better work/life balance and enhances job satisfaction.

Now is the time to leverage creative, sophisticated software technologies that will make a positive impact on employee retention. Automated scheduling software available in the market today allows you to create schedules with the confidence that everyone you place in a shift is truly qualified and available. This software also makes it easier to honor staff preferences and requests, and users can even check their schedules online.

Some more advanced scheduling systems offer the flexibility of providing schedulers with varying levels of assistance from manual to fully automated, easing the transition to the new system. Fully automated mode utilizes user-defined rules to rapidly create the most effective schedule to meet your care needs.

With an effective staff scheduling solution, you can save money today and prepare yourself long-term for handling the added requirements of Meaningful Use.

Schedulist software from Interbit Data

Interbit Data's Schedulist solution is built on a patent-pending scheduling algorithm that allows you to efficiently optimize your staff schedules to improve employee satisfaction and save time and money while reducing errors. And the entire solution is delivered completely over the web for a secure, cost-effective labor management solution.

Get scheduling right every time, easily, with Interbit Data's workforce scheduling software.

Contact Interbit Data to schedule a personalized demo, or visit www.interbitdata.com for more information.

Scheduling complaints cost medical center millions

In May 2011, Tufts Medical Center narrowly avoided a strike by 1,100 nurses over staffing and working conditions. The nurses were prepared to strike over what they considered to be unfair staffing practices, including not scheduling enough nurses per patient. Even though the strike was avoided by an eleventh hour bargain, preparation for the strike – including flying in substitute nurses from out of state – cost the hospital millions of dollars.

The U.S. nursing shortage is expected to reach 260,000 by 2025. In Canada, a nationwide shortage of 78,000 nurses is expected by the Canadian Nurses Association within the next three years, and is expected to reach 260,000 by 2025.

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