



Scheduling Automation Fosters Collaboration and Boosts Staff Engagement



The challenge

Paper-based scheduling causes inefficiencies

Caregivers across Providence Home and Community Care's (PHCC) skilled nursing and assisted living facilities were dependent on spreadsheet-based scheduling. The lack of true automation resulted in a process that was time-consuming for schedulers and did not allow for schedule input from front-line caregivers. The team at PHCC also wanted to be more strategic about staffing and labor costs. According to Holly Shepherd, regional director of operations, "Direct care is a big variable cost, and it's one of the few variable costs we have. We wanted to have the ability to better manage our direct care labor costs."

The organization first looked at their existing time and attendance application, but that system did not provide the scheduling functionality they needed. They then decided to take a closer look

at ABILITY, which was being used in other areas within Providence.



About Providence:

Providence Home and Community Care is part of Providence St. Joseph Health, a national, Catholic, not-for-profit health system serving communities across Alaska, California, Montana, New Mexico, Oregon, Texas and Washington.



The solution

Staffing and scheduling
automation streamlines
processes and
engages caregivers

After the key stakeholders within PHCC saw product demos of SMARTFORCE Scheduler, they were excited to move forward with ABILITY. Shepherd explains, “I was familiar with a different scheduling solution from my work at another organization. Initially, I was somewhat biased toward that solution. But, after seeing ABILITY SMARTFORCE, I realized it was a better tool for us.”

ABILITY SMARTFORCE Scheduler is now being used to create schedules across seven PHCC facilities. Schedulers develop the initial schedule and caregivers can see and request open shifts, trade shifts and request time off. Mobile access makes it easy for schedulers and caregivers to manage schedules from anywhere, anytime.

“Implementing ABILITY SMARTFORCE Scheduler has been, hands down, the most immediate value-added business solution and user-friendly technology I’ve been a part of in 25 years of healthcare operations.”

-Holly Shepherd, regional director of operations

The results

Efficient scheduling leads to stronger collaboration and increased staff satisfaction

By moving from a paper-based to an automated system, the team at PHCC now has tools that enable schedulers and caregivers to work more collaboratively, and everyone from the residents to the leadership team has realized benefits.

Streamlined processes

The automation has improved the entire scheduling workflow, from schedule creation to filling open shifts and bed management.



- **Faster schedule creation** – What used to take hours or even days now takes just five minutes. Instead of scheduling in four- or six-week blocks, PHCC now assigns a scheduling pattern that continues in perpetuity. Once the schedule is in the system, schedulers just need to manage exceptions. Front-line staff also appreciate the schedule predictability that this methodology provides.

Because scheduling takes so much less time, the organization has been able to realign some of its scheduling resources with other functions and increase scheduling bench strength among existing positions.



- **Collaborative open shift management** – Finding caregivers to fill open shifts used to be a one-sided process driven primarily by the schedulers with caregivers receiving multiple phone calls and in-person communication during their work and personal time from schedulers asking them to fill open shifts. This process has become more collaborative because needs can be viewed by all at any time. Staff now initiate filling gaps in the schedules without intervention from the schedulers. An added benefit is that there are fewer workday interruptions because caregivers are no longer getting phone calls about open shifts while they're attending to the needs of residents.

The results

continued...

“Front-line staff are now more engaged in the open shift management process, and we’re seeing more shifts being filled proactively. That benefits schedulers, caregivers and our residents.”

– Holly Shepherd, regional director of operations



• **Better control of variable labor costs** – The automation provides data that allows schedulers to better manage both overtime and agency costs. Now, when a scheduler has multiple staffing options, they can choose the most cost-effective resource. In addition, schedulers can validate agency timecards, which provides critical checks and balances and improves the oversight of agency staff.



• **Improved bed management** – Administrators have more data about where caregivers are and where there is additional capacity, which helps with the balance of bed management. “Decision-making is less emotional and more data-driven,” Shepherd noted. “Instead of making decisions from the gut, administrators can look at the schedule and use data about which caregivers are available, where there is capacity and where we need to add caregivers.”

A positive impact on people

In order to achieve true success, process improvements need to have a meaningful impact on staff as well. As Shepherd explains, “One of our pillars across Providence is to be the best employer. To really address issues for our caregivers and make them a priority, we have to make their lives easier through the business systems that we use. By moving to ABILITY SMARTFORCE, there was an instant increase in the satisfaction of our caregivers. This has been a tangible, measurable thing for employee satisfaction.”

The results

continued...



- **Caregivers have more control over their schedule** – Staff appreciate more autonomy and independence when it comes to their schedule. At PHCC, the ABILITY application is popular because it allows long-term planning and enables a better work/life balance. This has been welcomed by everyone, but particularly foreign-born staff, who can now plan months in advance to take weeks off to return to their home country.



- **Schedulers can take on a more strategic role** – With less time spent creating schedules and filling open shifts, the schedulers have seen their role evolving. Schedulers across facilities are sharing ideas and strategies as they become more adept at using the new technology. Shepherd shares, “As a network of schedulers, they are armed with more and better information to be more strategic, and they are sharing best practices around both the technology and related processes. For example, they’ve shared ideas about how to operationalize union-related seniority issues within our bargaining agreements. Their influence in conversations is growing because they have information and perspective now that they didn’t have in the one-dimensional paper world.



- **Leadership spends less time dealing with scheduling issues** - As staffing workflows are automated, supervisors do not need to be as involved as they were in the paper-based world. In addition, because processes have become more collaborative, there are fewer staffing issues that need to be escalated to the leadership team.



- **Cooperation across the enterprise** - Before the implementation of the staffing technology, it was difficult to deploy resources outside of their home facility. Now, with seven facilities across several states using the scheduling system, PHCC has been able to share resources when different markets are experiencing staffing shortages. The organization plans to expand this strategy to their licensed and professional staff, such as therapists.



The team at PHCC was looking for a staffing tool that could help them streamline processes, engage staff, contain costs and ensure high quality care for their residents, and that's what they've found with ABILITY SMARTFORCE Scheduler. Shepherd sums it up by saying, "For us, this initiative is about strategically improving financially, improving quality and improving the engagement of our caregivers."



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