

HEALTH EXECUTIVE. WHERE LEADERSHIP BEGINS.

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Technology: DIY Scheduling

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by Deborah Geering

Self-serve scheduling modules are easing management workload, adding to employee satisfaction, and helping hospitals maximize employee productivity.

The nursing managers at Piedmont Hospital in Atlanta are already building their staff schedules with the help of an online tool. But soon, the entire 1,600-member nursing staff will get in on the act too: staffers will be permitted to sign up for their preferred shifts with a self-scheduling program.

“Today’s workers want to control their work schedule as much as they can, and this provides that opportunity within the confines of what the facility needs,” said Connie Whittington, director of nursing of systems at Piedmont Hospital, a 500-bed acute-care tertiary facility.

Programmed with staffing and skill requirements for each shift in each unit, self-scheduling systems post and track personnel needs, enabling staffers to sign up for available shifts. The systems, often sold as add-on modules to larger workforce management systems, can save managers time because they empower staffers to do much of the scheduling work themselves. They can also reduce outsourcing and overtime costs because staffers maximize their efficiency by choosing shifts that work best for them. Perhaps most important, they can improve morale and retention rates.

“We see it as a huge staff satisfier,” Whittington said, “especially for nurses who work PRN; they can go ahead and pre-schedule the shifts that managers need extra help on. It gives them a lot of flexibility in making their decision about when they can work. And the regular staff has the same thing—if they have a specific event coming up, they can schedule around it.”

Piedmont opted to add the self-scheduling module to the enterprise staffing system it was already using, RES-Q Labor Resource Management. The system is a Windows-based, Web-enabled tool that creates schedules based on established clinical requirements, staffing patterns, and employee preferences.

Although the technology has been around for a few years, hospitals are just now catching on to the benefits of self-scheduling, said Michael Meisel, president of RES-Q Healthcare Systems, based in Calabasas, Calif. “It’s getting more traction,” he said. “These things take a long time to root themselves, but I’d say about half our new business gets self-scheduling to begin with.” >>>

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