Streamlined Hospital Staffing, Better Patient Outcomes, and Better Overall Care – All Made Possible with BlackBerry

U.S. Medical Facility

Industry:
Healthcare

Location:
North America

Product:
BlackBerry® AtHoc®

At a Glance

Exceptional patient care is the foundation of everything this community hospital does across its many primary and ancillary departments. Ensuring its daily staffing operations run as efficiently as possible is critical to this. To help streamline recruitment and scheduling, the hospital's resource operations center chose BlackBerry.

A Patient-First Approach

Effective resourcing is at the core of effective healthcare. In a hospital setting, it's more than a matter of convenience. Directing medical professionals, so they're always where they're most needed, is frequently a matter of life and death.

This physician's hospital understands that fact well. As part of a major network serving patients and their families across multiple regions, it employs several hundred clinical staff and several thousand support staff. Above all else, it defines itself by its approach to its patients.

"One of our pillars of belief is that the patient comes first," notes a manager at the hospital. "Everything kind of flows back into that. We don't want people to have an experience at any level of our organization where they're not getting our absolute best."

To that end, all inpatient beds are in private rooms. The hospital maintains a regularly-reviewed care model centered on positive patient outcomes. And finally, it prioritizes putting the right personnel in the right place at the right time.

To meet this priority, schedules must be organized and easily accessible, and staffing gaps must be filled as quickly as possible.

The hospital's operations center shoulders this complex task, managing nearly 40 departments, which between them offer a wide range of primary and ancillary services. Each agent in the operations center manages scheduling for several departments. Leadership understands the importance of efficiency, and regularly seeks new innovations to better enable these agents.

A Complex Logistical Challenge

"Our goal is to post a schedule with as close to no open shifts on it as possible," says one Lead Resource Specialist. "Ultimately, we consider ourselves successful only if we can solve staffing issues in such a way as not to impact patient care."

As the central call-in office for all hospital employees, the hospital operations center manages scheduling and resourcing for inpatient and ancillary facilities, staying in constant contact with departmental directors. When a schedule is ready, it is posted first to the hospital's senior employees per union directive.

From there, processes within the scheduling system post it to the larger employee base, allowing them to sign up on a first-come, first-served basis. Should a shift remain unclaimed or need to be filled, the operations center takes the initiative. First, it calls any personnel that has indicated they are available for an open shift.

If none of those staff are available, it must then reach out to anyone with the necessary expertise – a painstaking process if done manually, and one of the greatest potential bottlenecks in the resourcing process.

Seeking a Better Communications Platform

The hospital's existing alerting system was less than ideal. Messages took too long to compose, and there was far too much manual work whenever an alert had to be sent out. The operations center recognized that they were spending too much time on tasks that would be better off automated.

The final sign that something needed to change came during a recent emergency at the hospital. During the crisis, the operations center attempted to use its alerting system to notify employees of the threat. Unfortunately, since people were unable to opt out of receiving notifications from the platform, many configured their devices to ignore the alerts, and the operations center had no way of knowing who was notified.

Decision-makers at the hospital set out to replace their existing alerting system, seeking a solution that met several core requirements.

> "When we compare BlackBerry AtHoc to the processes that we had with our previous system, I can sit down and complete three or more alerts in the time it would have taken me to do one. And one template within BlackBerry AtHoc can replace over an hour's worth of manual calls. We're sending out multiple templates each day, so we're seeing huge time savings across the board."

– Lead Resource Specialist

First, a new solution would need to integrate seamlessly with the hospital's existing human resources system. Otherwise, operations center staff would have to manually update their listings every time a clinician moved to a different department or changed their job title. Even in a small facility, this would not be feasible.

"In a hospital, people move throughout the organization constantly," notes the Manager of the Patient Care Operations Center. "In order for us to be efficient and not have to manually change our list every single day, establishing a feed between our alerting system and our HR system was absolutely critical."

The hospital also needed the capacity to directly target certain individuals or groups based on a wide range of criteria, including job title, skills, education, and expertise. For instance, a pediatrician typically might not be contacted to fill a shift in an inpatient pharmacy – unless said pediatrician also possessed a pharmacological degree. The operations center needed a way to identify these outliers for recruitment purposes.

Finally, decision-makers sought a solution that would cut down on the time required to send out notifications, whether pertaining to an open shift or an emergency scenario. After evaluating its options, the hospital chose AtHoc Alert.

More Efficient Alerting and Scheduling

Each workstation in the hospital's operations center now supports two monitors, one displaying the scheduling system and the other displaying BlackBerry AtHoc. Both systems receive a feed from the hospital's human resources system that keeps them up-to-date with names, contact information, titles, and all other pertinent data. This allows unit schedulers to see at a glance anyone capable of covering a particular shift.

The hospital can now draw on an extensive set of pre-built templates that organize staff based on departments, hierarchy, and individual skills and specialties. This allows targeted alerts to be generated in a matter of minutes. All a scheduler has to do is enter some basic information, and ensure a message is not being sent to anyone marked as unavailable.

"We have templates set up in BlackBerry AtHoc for just about every department in the facility, and well-documented call-in procedures," explains the Manager of the Patient Care Operations Center. "If, for example, an employee is calling in from radiology, we know the appropriate steps to take and the appropriate templates to access. We also use BlackBerry AtHoc for proactive resourcing to help staff critical departments such as the Emergency Room."

BlackBerry AtHoc's multi-channel functionality has also proved valuable to unit schedulers, who now have several options for sending out notifications to hospital staff. The hospital can reach out via home phone, mobile phone, email, and text message. It has also created distribution lists for mass casualty events, enabling it to quickly bring more physicians to the facility as required.

"We were initially drawn to BlackBerry AtHoc because we knew BlackBerry had an established history within healthcare and government. Given our performance and reliability issues with our previous solutions, we didn't want to expend any time and effort on a company that didn't have some experience."

- Lead Resource Specialist

Staffing aside, the hospital plans to use BlackBerry AtHoc for emergency alerting based on parameters provided by its emergency management director. The platform's logging functionality allows the operations center to meet information requests from its two unions quickly. It's also proven useful for notifying staff of visits from regulatory agencies and governmental bodies.

Finally, BlackBerry AtHoc allows the operations center to work more effectively with staff unions to establish specific protocols around seniority and overtime. There are fewer grievances about shifts being awarded to staff that don't follow union guidelines. More importantly, all shift-related disputes are documented and easily auditable through the platform.

Better Flow, Better Outcomes

It can take nearly an hour to fill a shift manually – sometimes longer. With BlackBerry AtHoc, that process is cut down to a matter of minutes. The hospital's operations center can immediately take action when a shift needs to be filled, sending out targeted alerts to all staff capable of filling it.

The hospital is also using BlackBerry AtHoc to extend its reach. Its previous alerting system was unable to contact any of the hospital's international staff, which comprise a large percentage of its employee base. This enables the operations center to easily fill jobs that were once incredibly difficult to fill.

"Ultimately, our greatest measure of success is being able to fill open slots before those openings result in service or patient care interruptions," explains the hospital manager. "BlackBerry AtHoc allows us to achieve that. It helps us stick to our patient care model, and ensure patients receive the quality of care they deserve."

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