

Hospital-Owned Urgent Care Center

Locum tenens help keep doors open

When a large hospital in Central Florida opened an urgent care (UC) center in 2009, they hired Josh Plummer of PracticeWorx to help guide the UC center in making sure their physician staffing needs were fulfilled. The UC center saw 15 to 20 patients per day during the first year. That number has grown by over 20% since that time. The UC center is open every day from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and has one full-time and two part-time physicians. This gives the UC 70% coverage by the full-timer and 30% coverage by the part-timers. The part-timers are locums supplied by Staff Care, an AMN Healthcare company. But that was not always the case.

Challenge

The UC center was able to juggle their two regular part-timers and cover shifts during their first few years of operation, but by 2012, the situation with the part-timers was not working out the way the UC wanted. When the part-timers left, the UC experienced coverage issues, including having to close early on several occasions. The goal of the UC center is that every patient sees a physician, which was extremely difficult with only 70% coverage. And having to close the center due to a lack of physician coverage is detrimental to patient health and trust, as well as the bottom-line.

Being located an hour from major cities Tampa and Orlando, and with a growing physician and healthcare worker shortage, Josh knew it would be difficult to hire high-quality candidates quickly. So he turned to Staff Care, which he trusted and had partnered with previously to staff the emergency room of another hospital he was affiliated with.

Partnership

The key to the UC's staffing success is based on a consultative relationship that Josh and Staff Care forged at the start of their partnership. At first, Josh wanted to stay local to better fill some of the UC openings. But after numerous conversations, Staff Care was able to show the benefits of looking outside the area. Working through this challenge created a pattern of communication that helped identify who the right candidates were. These strategy sessions continue to this day on a regular basis.

"The Staff Care team took the time and asked a lot of questions about the practice, the location, the type of provider composition of the patient population, and the type of physician that would be successful in that environment," Josh said. "They asked a lot of questions to get a good feel for our needs and expectations. Then they went out and started reviewing candidates. Within a relatively short period of time, they were able to start providing me with some candidates to screen."

Results

After experiencing the stress and potential revenue loss from having to close the clinic due to inadequate physician coverage, Josh said that the overall cost of the locums is definitely less than having the clinic unable to see patients. Josh has now incorporated Staff Care into the staffing plan for the UC center to help him prepare and monitor resource availability. A staffing plan should detail the advantages of using a mix of temporary and permanent positions to overcome staffing shortages.

Staff Care was able to quickly react to the UC center's needs because it has one of the largest pools of UC candidates in the nation. By placing physicians who are prepared to make a difference their first day of work, Staff Care helps maintain coverage so the staff can concentrate on high-quality care and meeting patient needs, as well as keeping their bottom-line from bottoming out.

As stated earlier, the UC center had a preference to search locally, but Staff Care advised that would limit the search. Staff Care performed a location assessment, and with major cities an hour away, Staff Care said that going beyond the immediate area was not a detriment but a way to find excellent, well-qualified candidates. Plus, Staff Care locums have excellent qualifications and are typically seasoned travelers who adapt easily to their assignments. That advice resulted in reaching further and finding exceptional candidates who were able to cover all shifts and deliver high-quality patient care.

Today, the UC center's staffing schedule is completed in advance. Scheduling needs are discussed with the full-time doctor a month prior to scheduling. This proactive planning with Staff Care puts the team to work to fill the gaps. And the results have been no more worries about early closures.

Just this year, Staff Care covered 10 shifts in a month for the UC center. That is double what the UC center needed in past months. Part of this growth can be attributed to the rising popularity of the UC industry, which is expected to grow 6% each year through 2018. In addition, according to the Urgent Care Association of America, 80% of urgent care centers reported an increase in the number of patient visits in 2013.

"Staff Care has been very responsive to my needs and good to work with. So if I have a problem or need some additional help, I call them up and they get right on it," Josh said. "And that's why I like working with them."

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