

**CASE STUDY**

**How Data, Flexibility,  
and Empathy Make  
all the Difference**



At any time, and especially during a crisis, there is one thing that can be consistently relied upon to be clear, unemotional, and ever-present: data.

As the most esteemed academic medical center in the region, it is not surprising that Nebraska Medicine leverages data to ensure the right person is in the right place at the right time to deliver exceptional care.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, this penchant for data-driven decision making was put to the test as they had to staff up to meet all-time high demand, pivot to utilize staff from closed areas, as well as set up virus testing sites.

## PLANNING FOR THE UNEXPECTED | ACTING QUICKLY

For Nebraska Medicine, dealing with the extreme is nothing new. In 2014 they established a 10-bed Biocontainment Unit to treat patients with Ebola. Operational since 2005, this is one of 10 such units in the country equipped to handle an outbreak of this nature.

With that experience, Nebraska Medicine charged forward to plan for COVID-19. By utilizing extensive talent scenario planning they were able to anticipate a number of if/then situations.

The team ran simulations with staffing demands for a multitude of different census points across all active departments. This planning helped them realize they needed to be clever with the staff they had to be able to meet many possible outcomes.

To remain agile with their staff, even before volumes began to surge, Nebraska Medicine formed an interdisciplinary team consisting of leaders from Inpatient Nursing Units, Nursing Professional Practice (educators), Staffing Operations, and HR. This team was initially meeting daily to discuss training and deployment of resources to meet increased demand.

Of critical importance was the role of PPE educators. With most of the staff unaccustomed to such protocols, training on the donning and doffing of PPE was mission critical.

Especially so because of their innovative use of what they called “extenders.” These were qualified caregivers from areas that did not have demand, like OR, outpatient and elective surgery sites, who could be utilized to help extend the staffing ratios in certain areas.

### EXHIBIT 1

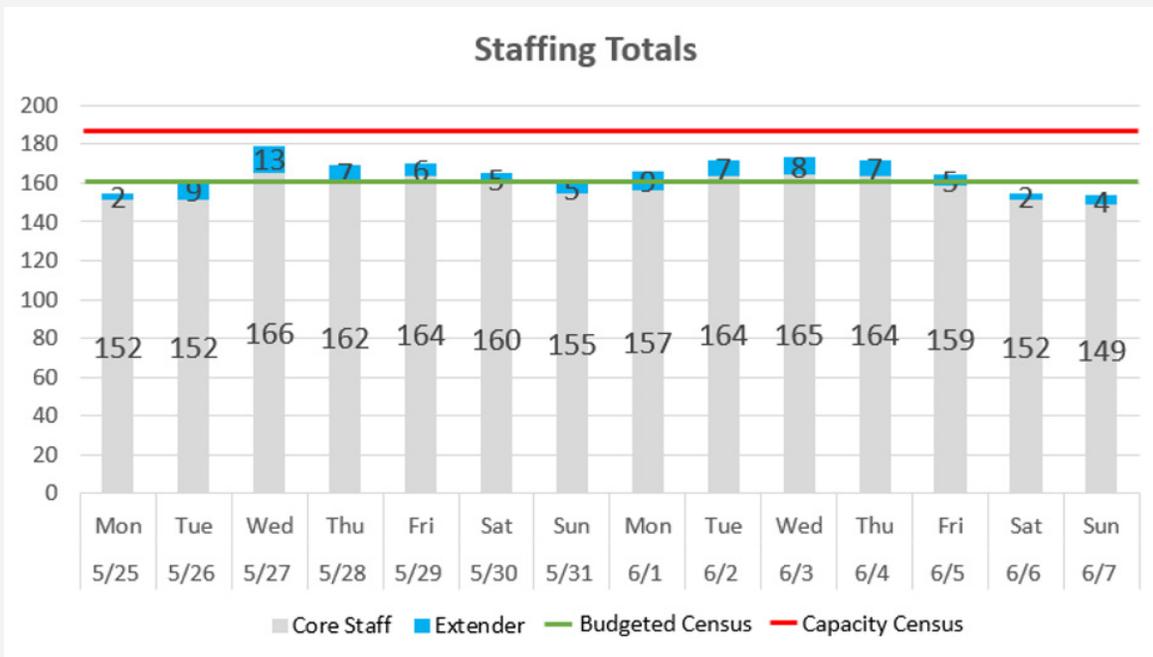
An illustration of how the role of a Med Surge RN extender allowed an ICU to safely extend staffing ratios.



Utilizing Smart Square® healthcare scheduling software from AMN Healthcare, they were able to set up outpatient employee profiles in a flex pool. Each extender received role-appropriate orientation and had a unique profile and skill set built in Smart Square. At the centralized resource center, Staffing Strategists utilized the software to balance the supply of staff with demand, assess day-of needs, and deploy these flexible resources to the areas needed most to either take patients or assist as extenders.

### EXHIBIT 2

A snapshot of how data was leveraged to deploy extenders to smooth out staffing numbers during peak volumes.



In addition to mobilizing for the acute care environment, Nebraska Medicine also set up Universal Swab Centers to provide COVID-19 testing.

In under two days they were able to set up an additional staffing pool comprised of staff from the underutilized areas. They opened two sites across town from one another in traditionally underserved areas of the greater Omaha community. Staff would pick up shifts for the morning drive-thru testing site in one part of the city, the afternoon shift, or both, “floating” from one to the other over the lunch hour.

Via these locations, Nebraska Medicine was able to perform 66,500 swab COVID tests. And, once vaccines were made available, the sites took on vaccine administration as well.

## EMPATHY AND UNDERSTANDING

Running the Resource Management Center (RMC) at that time was David Seeley. A career business analyst supporting acute care, his experience in staffing helped him see his role with a different lens, understanding that people are behind the data.

What does it mean to a unit or department that is running short staffed? What does it mean to a nurse on a unit that is running short? Staffing is complicated, requiring an understanding of logistics and business processes, but doing it right means approaching it with empathy.

By working side by side with house supervisors and nurse managers, David was able to connect the dots and understand the importance of balancing staff and maximizing every available resource. Understanding what it’s like for the healthcare professionals working on the unit – and showing that you understand – built a trust between the staffing office and nursing leadership.



One example of this understanding in action was the use of agency staff to smooth the staffing on day/shifts that were harder to fill or had a projected higher census. Rather than put the onus on core staff, agency staff were asked to schedule around core staff preferences to balance schedules.

## DEPARTMENT SPOTLIGHT



The Pharmacy Department at Nebraska Medicine has three locations that offer retail, specialty, and bedside discharge services.

In the summer of 2021 Nebraska Medicine moved forward to adopt Smart Square within the 150-person department, having utilized the tool successfully in inpatient nursing areas since 2018. With the pandemic still causing resource constraints in addition to the usual high prescription order volumes, the department relied on AMN Healthcare resources to manage the implementation so they could focus on serving their patients.

Prior to Smart Square, the department utilized a different third-party scheduling solution which required paper processes and manual workarounds in the technology, resulting in the department manager spending upwards of 20 hours per week on schedule-related tasks.

In addition to better manager tools and an improved user experience for all, Smart Square provides team members access to self-scheduling capabilities. Now, instead of being given their schedules and having to trade shifts or request the changes they need, staff can create their schedules within certain parameters that enable them to better balance the needs of their department and their personal lives – a major satisfier. It also reduces work for the manager, as the number of schedule edits have drastically reduced.

This feature, as well as other automation within the software, including cyclic patterns that can be created and managed with a few clicks, is forecasted to result in a weekly time savings of 15 hours for the manager with a goal of even more time savings to come. These 15 extra hours per week has afforded the manager the opportunity to be more present for his large team, working beside them more often and helping them upskill.

Moving forward, the enterprise transparency of Smart Square will be leveraged as Nebraska Medicine launches a new prescription fill facility in mid-2022. This new facility will increase capacity and centralize processes for greater efficiency.

## FOCUS ON PARTNERSHIP AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Another unique element that arose during the pandemic was the advent of weekly all-client calls with other AMN Healthcare clients. AMN facilitated these discussions to encourage its clients to not work through this situation in silos. Just as an RMC benefits an organization from having a 30,000-foot view of staffing, AMN clients should have a similar view into the strategies being employed across the country.

By attending these meetings, David and his peers at other health systems were able to share their emerging best practices and get advice from AMN consultants on other ideas to implement.

Like never before, the COVID-19 pandemic brought provider organizations together along with AMN and other partners in the industry to help our communities. Without the tireless dedication and bright minds at Nebraska Medicine and other leading organizations across the country, we would not be where we are today, seeing signs of hope on the very near horizon.

**VISIT [AMNHEALTHCARE.COM](https://www.amnhealthcare.com)** to learn more about how the scheduling technology, staff planning solutions, analytics, and expertise only available from AMN Healthcare can help organizations establish the right talent management strategy for their specific challenges and strengths.