

## Clinical Transition Staffing Plays Key Role in Health System's Successful EMR Conversion



As the digital revolution in healthcare kicks into high gear, physicians, hospitals and other healthcare providers across the country are working diligently to meet upcoming federal deadlines for demonstrating “meaningful use” of electronic medical records (EMR). While most hospitals have already adopted EMR systems, some, like a Midwestern health system serving a tri-state area, are upgrading to better systems in an effort to improve patient care as well as to ensure readiness for increasingly complex federal EMR standards.

### The challenge

This Midwestern health system, which encompasses a major acute-care hospital, a medical center, medical group and a myriad of other inpatient and outpatient healthcare facilities and services, has been providing comprehensive healthcare services since the late 1800s and prides itself on the quality of its healthcare professionals. With more than 3,500 employees and a medical staff of more than 750 physicians, the system is one of the largest employers in the region.

Faced with a major EMR upgrade for its flagship 523-bed hospital, the health system needed clinical staffing support during both the staff education component and ‘go live’ period for its new Allscripts EMR system. Hospital managers were concerned about maintaining patient care quality and staff morale in the midst of this transition. So they turned to their longtime clinical staffing partner, AMN Healthcare, for assistance. As the nation’s leader in healthcare workforce and staffing solutions, AMN has special expertise in helping healthcare facilities achieve smooth and successful EMR conversions.

### The plan

AMN experts worked with the hospital to devise a transition plan that would provide EMR-savvy supplemental staff throughout the implementation. “Our goal was to provide the hospital with the appropriate levels of support for each of the implementation stages,” said Kimberly Martini, Division Vice President, AMN Healthcare. “This is critical to avoid efficiency declines that can impact patient care.”

Martini said studies have shown that hospitals can experience as much as a 25-percent drop in staff productivity during the ‘go live’ event and up to four weeks afterward unless proper support is provided.

### Expect the unexpected

AMN began the first phase of the hospital’s EMR conversion project by sending in supplemental staff to free up clinical workers for EMR classroom training. Not long into the first phase, the hospital experienced EMR system implementation problems. “They discovered through testing that they needed to make technical changes that would push out the ‘go-live’ date by several months,” said Martini.

As fate would have it, the hospital was entering its high patient census period, its nurse vacancy rate was up and newly hired nursing graduates wouldn’t arrive for six months. “It was the perfect storm,” said Martini. “Even though the EMR implementation was delayed, additional nursing staff was still needed due to the rising census and other factors. But we were ready with great nurses already geared up to assist them.”

## The solution

Due to the hospital's varied needs, AMN ultimately sent in 176 contingent nurses and other clinical staff over a six-month period. This included contingent staffing for several months during the hospital's rising census followed by several weeks before and after the EMR implementation. "I think the take-away message is that hospitals should factor in historical census data, vacancy rates and so forth in their planning and not only look at staffing needs for the EMR conversion," said Martini.

As the conversion began, AMN provided the following:

### Pre-launch supplemental staffing freed up time for classroom training

"Lowering patient assignments for nurses and other staff immediately before and after EMR 'go live' allows staff the time to learn on the job without being forced to shoulder a complex technical burden on top of a normal demanding day," said Martini. "Our expert nurses backfilled for hospital staff, freeing up core nurses and other clinical staff to attend EMR classroom training."

### Go-live support ensured care quality

Bringing in additional staff lowers nurse-patient ratios, which gives core staff time to adjust to the new system. "When the core staff is learning a new system in the live environment, it's quite different from the classroom setting," said Martini. "AMN's high quality 'go-live' team picked up the extra patients, so the core staff had more time to understand how to use the new system without the risk of compromising patient care."

### EMR-savvy nurses sped staff adoption

"During the go-live period, and for 2-5 weeks immediately following, on-site experts are needed who possess both clinical and EMR experience," said Martini, noting AMN supplied nurses well-versed on the hospital's new EMR system. "Most of our nurses have this type of expertise, which they've learned through their travel assignments to healthcare facilities around the country," she added. "We know these nurses are a major help to core staff in learning the new system. This can relieve frustration, reduce adoption times and lower costs, often from unbudgeted training and other staff problems."

## Results

The hospital was extremely pleased both with AMN's staffing flexibility and with the assistance provided before, during and after the EMR conversion. The conversion was a success and AMN continues to be the hospital's primary provider of contingent staffing services. "We haven't had to go outside of AMN simply because they help us with every need," said their HR director.

To learn more about AMN EMR Conversion Staffing Services, call **(866) 871-8519** or visit **[www.amnhealthcare.com](http://www.amnhealthcare.com)**

