Science Answers Healthcare Staffing Challenges

By Dan White, AMN Healthcare, President, Strategic Workforce Solutions

Hospitals and healthcare facilities grapple with staffing challenges every day. Many units plan staffing from one shift to the next; beyond that, workforce needs are determined only through rough estimates. Clinical managers spend up to 70% of their time coping with common staffing problems:

- Shortages of physicians, nurses and allied health professionals
- Extreme staffing imbalances among units
- Staffing on the fly
- Clinical staff not working up to FTE commitments
- Forced overtime, floating and cancellations
- Recurring open shifts
- Frequent staffing escalations
- Labor cost overruns
- Burnout

These problems not only mar the clinical work environment and exasperate staff, but they also undermine the most vital objectives of the healthcare enterprise. Many studies have shown a clear correlation between staffing and a variety of critical issues:

- Patient safety and outcomes
- Patient satisfaction
- Quality of care
- Revenue
- Clinician satisfaction and retention

But healthcare staffing problems are not inevitable. They occur because traditional healthcare planning practices, unlike in many other industries, have not included accurate forecasting of resource needs. In healthcare, our most important resources are our people.

Healthcare staffing joins the age of algorithms

Today, most other industries utilize technology-aided forecasting to plan future resource needs, and sophisticated strategic planning to fill those needs. Healthcare can do it, too. Business intelligence, data analytics, predictive modeling and standardized practices can be utilized in strategic staffing planning, tailored to the needs of each healthcare enterprise and each unit. Instead of planning only for the next shift, it is possible to plan accurately for the next three months of shifts.

Not only would this solve persistent administrative and management challenges at hospitals and healthcare systems, but it also would be very welcomed by healthcare professionals themselves.

Scientific demand prediction and forecasting — and innovative practices to accurately fulfill that demand — are now available in healthcare. The science of healthcare workforce planning begins with gathering healthcare business intelligence ranging from historical census data to local weather trends, along with instituting standardized best management practices, such as consistent shift start and end times, for better data alignment.

All the information is run through hundreds of standard algorithms and mathematical models from which are generated a variety of complex analyses that result in staffing need forecasts 120 days in advance of the shift.

Once an accurate staffing forecast is developed, the healthcare enterprise or an individual unit can determine how many and what kind of staff it actually needs to care for patients in the future. At this point, a reputable staffing partner is critical to fulfill workforce needs through:

- Advanced healthcare staffing
- A comprehensive network of healthcare professionals
- Education to prepare clinicians for emerging and high-demand roles
- Innovative workforce solutions including Managed Services Programs (MSP) and Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO)
- Quality standards for healthcare professionals equal to the nation's top hospitals

Breakthrough cure for staffing challenges

One such labor management company seeing results with this approach is Avantas, the pioneer in applying predictive modeling to healthcare staffing. Its documented results for leveraging predictive modeling effectively include a 4% to 7% savings over the prior year of labor spending. Considering that labor costs are more than half of all expenditures for hospitals and healthcare systems, these savings can be substantial. Other results include more than 75% of open shifts filled at least two weeks in advance and time savings of 7-15 hours per manager per pay period.

Additionally, these practices help staff fulfill the FTEs for which they were hired, right-size the balance between contingent and core staffing and reduce staff cancellations and forced overtime.

Other outcomes are even more fundamental:

- Improvements in patient care, patient experience and patient outcomes
- Better job satisfaction and less burnout
- Smoother transition to new models of value-based, patient-centered care and population health programs
- Optimization of current core and contingent staff

In healthcare, breakthrough cures can alleviate widespread disease — once those treatments are in general use. Likewise, the science of healthcare workforce planning will be able to resolve the burdensome staffing problems that afflict hospitals and healthcare systems today.

Dan White is President of Strategic Workforce Solutions at AMN Healthcare

AMN Healthcare and Avantas joined together at the end of 2014 in order to create a comprehensive workforce planning solution from forecasting to fulfillment. AMN is the innovator in workforce solutions and national leader in healthcare staffing; Avantas developed the science of workforce planning, demand forecasting and operational best practices for the healthcare enterprise. Together, AMN and Avantas have created an end-to-end model in which future staffing needs are determined and then filled with the top quality healthcare professionals.

To learn more about Predictive Analytics & Strategic Staffing, call **(866) 871-8519** or visit **www.amnhealthcare.com**

We've earned
The Joint Commission's
Gold Seal of Approval™

PEER REVIEWED
by HFMA®

Workforce Solutions–MSP

AMN ®
Healthcare