



5 Secrets to Better Scheduling of Mobile Workers for In-Home Healthcare



Mobility matters. That's true not only for individuals but for organizations within the healthcare industry.

Mobile workers will be the lifeline of a critical care-delivery infrastructure that will reach and care for all these patients. At the same time, budgets are tightening up everywhere, creating a mandate for health care organizations to do more with less. Delivering quality care more efficiently will be a necessity across the industry to keep up with the demands of shifting demographics.

As the mobile workforce grows, the greatest challenge facing healthcare administrators is how to keep track of and deploy all these mobile workers. That's a key issue for many reasons, including resource planning, the safety of the mobile workers and patients, closer payroll tracking, and ensuring patients receive the care that they need.

Driving fundamental change requires a new framework that addresses the needs of patients, caregivers, and home health care as a whole. Learn five key secrets to scheduling success to optimize care and efficiency.

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Old School Is Not Cool

Move beyond manual scheduling methods

Though medical technology has advanced at an incredible rate, the administrative side of healthcare has been slow to keep up. Administrators, focused on delivering care and managing staff, have been reluctant to try new methods. Scheduling today is often still done by hand, in an Excel spreadsheet or with an ad hoc system pieced together using various programs. It's not uncommon to see schedules put together on paper or a whiteboard.

Tools Used for Nursing Scheduling

Scheduling Tools	% Respondents
Paper-based staffing tools	24%
Digital spreadsheets	19%
Online posting of vacant shifts	10%
Technology-enhanced tools	40%
Other	15%
Don't use any scheduling tools	23%

AMN Healthcare

The bigger problem is that tools like spreadsheets and email are not flexible enough for the on-demand needs of a mobile workforce. Getting vital information to the person who needs it immediately can be frustrating. Data scattered across different systems is hard to analyze.

Version control is an ongoing problem, as there is no way to know if you have the most updated information. Important notes and credentials are easily forgotten and you can't match patients to the appropriate caregiver without detailed profiles.

Finally, it's hard to get a handle on trends, produce insights about workflow patterns or generate other helpful metrics that you need to get ahead. Maximizing organizational efficiency, creating a great experience for patients and optimizing patient/providers matches are all but impossible by these old methods.

Manual scheduling methods were adequate for static, centralized healthcare facilities. They won't work in the emerging mobile healthcare model. Scaling up to meet the diverse needs of a growing patient population will require a smarter approach to scheduling.

Best practices

A more intelligent, less error-prone scheduling system relies on automation to eliminate the most time-consuming and problematic parts of this process. It assures total coverage for the care unit using business rules, schedule constraints, employee certifications, matching skill sets and customer relationships. It is smart, powerful and fast.

The best automated scheduling system can

Manage and accommodate a diverse workforce of full-time, part-time and temporary contract workers.

Automatically assign the right health care professionals to the right patient based on the care giver's skill set, certifications, and other assets.

Match up healthcare professionals who have previous experience with a given patient or their family members.

Submit profiles for each of your healthcare professionals with expirations of certificates, skill sets, etc. to ensure there are no hiccups in the field.

Give instant insight into logistics in the field.

Customer Success Is a Big Deal in Healthcare, Too

Own the patient experience

It's no accident that patient experience is the first goal of the triple aim framework. Centering the customer experience in your care delivery model will allow you to gain valuable insights into both the needs of patients and strengths of caregivers, and to build a strong network of health care professionals who can meet the needs of diverse populations.

Customer success means better health and lowered costs. Healthcare, unlike some services, requires collaboration between the patient and provider. Trust, rapport and mutual understanding are key to this success. Dissatisfied patients won't share pertinent information with their caregiver, which often results in a costlier intervention in an emergency medical setting. Unhappy patients may frequently change services or providers. They may not comply with their treatment. These incidents, multiplied out across the field, are unsustainable, from both an economic and social perspective.

Though these issues are a problem across the health industry at large, home health care offers some unique challenges.

After all, there is probably nothing more intimate than having someone come into to your home to care for you. When you factor in the vulnerabilities experienced by elderly and disabled populations, it becomes easy to understand why patients might be choosy about who they feel comfortable with. It might be something simple, like a woman preferring care by another woman, or there might be a lot of unique factors to consider when matching patients with the right caregivers.

It is more than a matter of patient preference. As health organizations evaluate the health of communities, an awareness of differences is emerging. The health needs of men, for example, differ significantly from the health needs of women. Different populations have unique risk profiles. More specialization and more focused care is better care. Social health, too, plays a significant role in health outcomes.

Best practices

Building social and skill profiles can help make sure patients are matched with someone that has the right skills and the right social intelligence. Knowing the strengths of your team is key to building a responsible and agile workforce of caregivers.

The family is an important ally in home health care, and working closely with the family is an easy, inexpensive way to optimize the care provided, and to prevent avoidable incidents. Communicating with other members in the patient's care-sphere, and providing training, support, and education is key to success. For the family, knowing when the professional is coming, being able to get easily in touch, learning the outcome of home visits, and being empowered to share concerns and observations requires that information be easily—but securely—shared between all involved parties.

From an administrative end, that means immediately being able to pull up where workers are by region, availability, skill set and other criteria, as well as to track successful matches and other care details. Travel routes are pain points, too. Home care services can use technology to optimize the routes of mobile workers to minimize travel costs,

as well as the service costs, while providing timely, reliable service to patients in need.

Best practices in owning the patient experience call for an organization to instantly align the needs of the patients with the credentials and availability of your mobile workers. This will ensure a more positive customer experience from initial contact to the delivery of treatment. Patients will gain more transparency and confidence in their care givers and organizations can be sure they dispatch the right professional for the best care, and that the providers are given the tools they need. With that foundation, the true work of improving the patient experience begins.

Employees and patients want the same thing

Empower and delight your healthcare professionals

On the other hand, healthcare administrators have another customer to consider—the health care professional. As home healthcare organizations face greater demand and more competition, attracting, training and retaining the best workers will become a huge priority. Caregiver burnout and the resulting turnover costs an estimated 5 billion each year. Demoralized employees also frequently change jobs, miss work and make costly mistakes.

The number one frustration for home health care workers is feeling overwhelmed with documentation requirements. Many caregivers spend more time documenting on paper than caring for clients, and some have a double burden of manually entering this information into a database.

Scheduling mistakes are also one of the leading causes of lowered morale. These mistakes take a toll on both workers and patients. They can leave pockets of understaffing, even when there are enough professionals on staff, or profoundly inconvenience workers who are not needed.

For patients, poor scheduling can result in mistakes where the wrong provider was sent to the wrong appointment, either due to a time/location mix up or because the provider didn't have the right skill sets. Even when things go right, mobile workers need adequate notice so they can adequately prepare for their appointments.

When you empower the health care professional to succeed, both the professional and the patient are more satisfied with the outcomes, and the organization is more efficient, too.

Best practices

That National Association for Homecare and Hospice recommends implementing point-of-care, GPS and EVV technology to streamline data collection and provide real-time communication in the field. Documentation is done in real-time, and workers, patients and administrators stay connected. Scheduling automation frees up administrators to focus on the clinical practice and organizational goals.

Visibility into the field helps keep workers and patients safe, too, with no time wasted pinpointing location when problems arise.

The one size fits all approach to workforce management just isn't effective when working

with remote teams of full time, part time, and temporary 1099 workers, all of whom have different needs and expectations. Managing the needs of a diverse team of workers requires a sophisticated system that knows where people are and what they are doing in real time.

Manual methods and spreadsheets just can't gather and compare essential data from the field quickly enough to provide useful insights into what is working and what isn't. State of the art, future-forward health organizations use integrated systems that empower workers and put the patient and not paperwork first.

What does this look like in practice?

Each professional has a mobile app, ensuring they have all the job details they need in time to prepare for the appointment.

A scheduling app collects data about the appointment in real time while the worker is still in the field.

Mobile workers can take pictures or video and send them immediately back to support staff in the office.

If there are any delays or surprises in transit, the mobile worker can communicate with dispatchers as it happens.

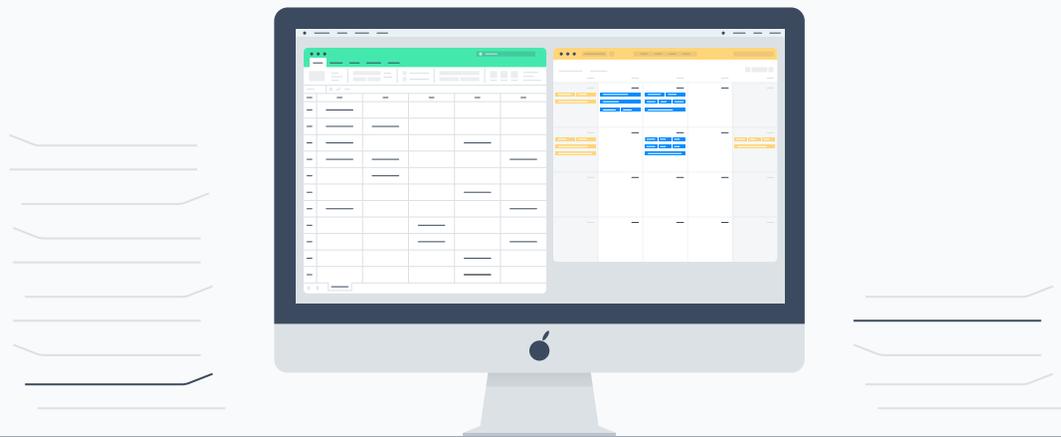
Efficiency is the ultimate measure of organizational health

Prioritize organizational efficiency

The US healthcare system is one of the costliest in the world, as well as the most inefficient. As healthcare costs continue to rise, along with demand, administrative efficiency offers the richest field for cost-cutting methodologies. Getting staffing right is essential to an efficient and productive operation. There are significant costs associated with overstaffing and understaffing, so organizations with the best information are at an advantage. The best information cannot come from fragmented and disconnected scheduling systems, though.

Without system-wide updates and real time communications, managers and decision makers have no visibility into what is happening in the field.

The drive to reduce healthcare costs is a system wide approach, which is why aligning workers, patients and administrative processes will set your home health care organization up to succeed within the new framework. Adopting point-of-care technology and selecting a reliable software partner are key to success in this framework.

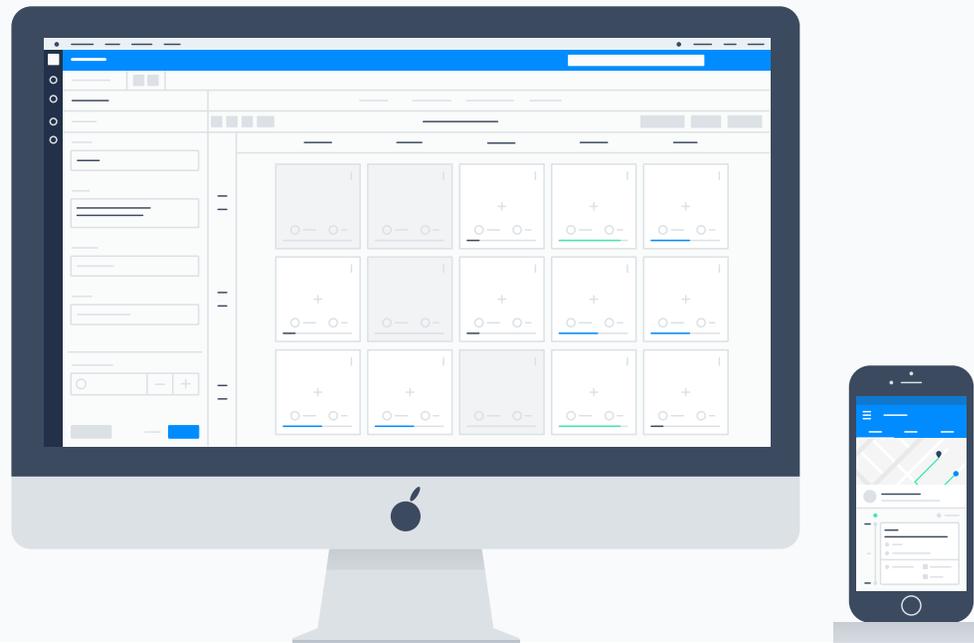


Best practices

When capacity is tight, knowing where workers are, when they will finish up, and how long it takes to reach the next site can help schedulers create a seamless, pain-free process for both caregivers and patients.

A mobile app with scheduling capabilities meets the specifications of best practices in this area. This allows the leading healthcare providers to manage team performance with visual resource mapping, know who is where instantly with real time location tracking and answer inquiries with live travel updates.

Administrative costs drop when scheduling automation eliminates manual scheduling entries and evaluates resource planning to maximize utilization of mobile workers. Greater productivity lowers operating costs and clear visibility into mobile worker progress eliminates expensive disconnects.



Scheduling for Greater Productivity Is Easier Than You Think

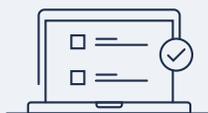
Evaluate solutions and implement the best

Fortunately, many healthcare organizations have already seen significant cost savings and productivity improvements by upgrading their approach to scheduling.

“Scheduling problems are not only solvable but solutions are also within reach of organizations of all types....”

Technology can improve patient access to health care both directly and indirectly.” Those conclusions came from the US Institute of Medicine at the National Academy of Sciences. They compiled the nation’s most successful healthcare initiatives in their report, “Innovation and Best Practices in Health Care Scheduling.” [IM at NAS]

Here are a few of the report’s surprising findings



Through relatively simple changes in scheduling, Kaiser Permanente increased efficiency and utilization above 85%. They lowered their cost of care using the Internet, mobile and video tech.



The US will encounter a shortage of more than 130,600 physicians by 2025, without more intelligent scheduling of healthcare providers and staff.



The privacy of patient information is governed by PHI, ePHI, HIPAA, HITECH and other programs. Communications about patients with mobile healthcare workers needs stronger security protections than traditional communication channels can provide. [HealthIT.gov]

Home healthcare organizations can position themselves as vital members of the larger health care continuum by providing efficient, high quality care. Optimizing caregiver/patient matches, successfully managing mobile workforces and improving efficiency and financial health are only possible with the right technology partner.

Solution

Ask the following questions as you look into technologies that can improve your scheduling processes and make life easier for you, your patients and your mobile workers.

What are the security protocols covering the software's connectivity? Any time workers need to communicate about sensitive patient data, the software becomes especially vulnerable. That's why the rules governing connectivity are so highly regulated under oversight guidelines such as HIPAA.

What is the provider's tech strategy? Advanced use of APIs to connect and communicate among platforms must be one of their critical concerns. APIs are a more secure channel for transferring data such as provider insurance, payroll information, medical documents and information covered by government oversight.

Can you create mobile worker profiles that include specifics on worker specializations and certifications?

Can you track your workers in real-time along the route for better communication with the patient and office administrators?

How much time will this software save your scheduler in coordinating and adjusting schedules, then communicating with everyone concerned about the latest arrangements?

How does this solution optimize office staff time and efforts while lowering operating costs and improving the patient experience?

Mobility is the future. Your patients and your workers know it. The next step is to bring your medical office scheduling software into the 21st century and make mobility easier for everyone.



Hassle-free mobile workforce scheduling—built for the field and loved by the entire team

For a growing number of organizations in the non-traditional field service industry, efficient and affordable solutions for mobile-workforce scheduling are helping mid-market firms move beyond outdated manual scheduling and into an era of speed, simplicity, and efficiency. Previously only available and affordable to companies with the resources to make large, long-term investments, mobile workforce scheduling is now accessible to the mid-market.

Skedulo builds essential mobile-first applications for growing businesses that empower people at work. With intelligent resource mapping, complex scheduling automation, instantaneous service updates, geo-tracking, and native integration with Salesforce.com, Skedulo empowers organizations worldwide to transform the way they manage and deploy their mobile workforces. By eliminating logistical limitations, and providing unparalleled on-demand scheduling tools and transparency, Skedulo allows companies to deliver on the promise of a world-class client experience, from service request to completion.

Founded in 2013, and with offices in Australia, North America and Asia, Skedulo has enabled companies to seamlessly schedule and service more than 2.3 million appointments all around the globe. For more information, please visit www.skedulo.com

San Francisco, CA
+1 (855) 753-3856
www.skedulo.com

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