

Overview

Solution: Call Scheduler™

Location: Alexandria, MN

Providers On-Call: 240

Key Benefits

- Time savings
- Improved accuracy
- Efficient patient care
- Accurate reporting
- EMTALA compliance

Together, Alexandria Clinic and Douglas County Hospital are one of Minnesota's largest integrated community health care networks. In partnership with Heartland Orthopedic Specialists and several other medical clinics, the network leverages 10 specialty care groups to serve a variety of patients with diverse needs throughout rural, west-central Minnesota.

Challenge

Before its integration with Douglas County Hospital, Alexandria Clinic used Adjuvant physician scheduling product Call Scheduler™ to schedule its family practice providers for their rotation of night and weekend call. The lead family practice physician determined the rules for the rotations, such as the number of weekends and holidays, and used Call Scheduler to evenly assign family practice providers accordingly.

When the clinic integrated with the hospital, however, scheduling became much more complex: In total, there were approximately 240 providers and staff to coordinate and schedule. The hospital system was primarily paper based and required sending notes back and forth among departments to determine schedules, notify each other of changes, and to know who was in which buildings at which time. The integration expanded the types of health care professionals that needed scheduling, including therapists, chaplains and surgery staff.

“Our switchboard department would spend hours putting together the schedule manually,” said Tommie Plaster, patient access supervisor at the hospital. “Then they sent it electronically to each station and printed out a copy for each one. There was a lot of room for error, such as typing in the wrong phone number, forgetting to print a copy for a station or entering the wrong provider.”

Problems also arose when someone needed to change their call schedule, which happened frequently. “When a call change was made – by email, a phone call or even a written note – our staff updated the electronic schedule, sent it out to everyone, and then contacted each station to make sure they knew about the change. The problem was, not everyone would check for updates and mistakes were still made. It was very inefficient,” explained Plaster.

Pam Miller, director of operations at Alexandria Clinic, noted that although the clinic family practice physicians used Call Scheduler, there were many more providers to consider after the integration with Douglas County Hospital.

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"The manual scheduling process took a huge amount of time to manage with so many physicians, departments and locations," she said. "In addition, we'd have the occasional problem of calling a physician at 2 a.m. to come in, but in fact he or she wasn't really on call. We knew there had to be a better way."

Solution

After looking at a variety of options, Alexandria Clinic and Douglas County Hospital decided to expand the use of Call Scheduler. "We knew Call Scheduler could continue to help us now that we were integrated with the hospital," said Miller. "It gave us the best variety and functionality for what we needed."

With Call Scheduler, both the clinic and the hospital receive an online solution for permanently eliminating duplication and manual processing of on-call information.

Call Scheduler's user-friendly system enables schedulers to create daily on-call rosters and integrate schedules among groups in a fraction of the time that was required in the past. With a rule-based scheduling engine or Microsoft® Excel import ability, users can create a fair schedule for providers. And if help is needed, Adjuvant provides free, unlimited phone support.

Each schedule automatically feeds accurate on-call information to on-call management systems, thereby eliminating the need to double-enter information into multiple systems.

Because a provider's information is saved in the system, the scheduler simply has to choose the correct provider from a drop-down menu to add him or her to the schedule. When changes are made, a notification and new schedule updates are displayed instantly for all users – all with one click.

In addition, Call Scheduler provides:

- Customized views: See the most pertinent information, including views by day, department and role.
- Integration: Call Scheduler integrates with Microsoft Outlook and Google Calendar to automatically send schedules and changes to user's mobile devices, reducing the likelihood of double-scheduling and missed assignments.
- Documentation: A secure, documented way to make and communicate changes, especially for EMTALA compliance and other regulatory audits. Users can also save past on-call rosters and retrieve them as needed.

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"It certainly saved our family practice doctor a huge amount of time."

Results

Throughout implementation, Miller and Plaster worked closely with Adjuvant and their respective colleagues to ensure call needs were met.

"At the clinic, we listened to concerns and made accommodations where it was possible, especially when it came to creating different schedules and views," said Miller. "The team at Adjuvant was absolutely fantastic about helping us and would patiently walk us through any issue to fix it. And if we had to leave a message, they seemed to call us back within seconds."

Plaster noted that Adjuvant worked with the hospital team on specialty views. For instance, the ER doctors didn't want to see everyone's schedule, so they created views for certain departments and edited the order of the schedules.

"Adjuvant was incredibly patient and worked with us to get the views we wanted," she explained. "Everyone I trained on how to use Call Scheduler thought it was very easy and the response has been overwhelmingly positive. Once the data was entered and basics were inputted, the implementation wasn't difficult."

The ability to take disparate schedules and aggregate them in one central location has delivered huge benefits to the clinic and hospital, including:

Time savings

The amount of time dedicated to scheduling has plummeted, freeing up individuals to attend to other needs. "It's certainly saved our family practice doctor a huge amount of time," said Miller. "He still schedules the family practice providers, but he can do it in a fraction of the time. For the other schedules, we had three people working on them and now we just need one! It's so much more streamlined."

Plaster concurred. "Our switchboard department would have to spend a few hours working on schedule and changes – that's not the case anymore."

Improved scheduling accuracy

"One of the biggest benefits for the hospital has been the protocols," said Plaster. "Once we enter in a provider's name and contact information, it's in the system for good. That really reduces the chance for errors. Plus, we can inactivate providers who leave, create jobs, and change access rules all by ourselves without having to call Adjuvant", but you could if you wanted to.

A schedule is more than just a schedule; the clinic and the hospital found that schedules have a lot of complexity, but that Call Scheduler helps them manage it. "We would implement Call Scheduler again in a minute," Miller said.

Enhanced patient care

Patients are better served with a more efficient call schedule. “If someone needs an emergency C-section, we have to be confident that we know which OB is on call,” said Plaster. “This helps us get providers to the patient as quickly as possible.”

When the hospital’s internet went down, the staff couldn’t access Call Scheduler on their computers. However, those with smart phones could access the schedule from their phones. “We’d had a back-up plan to print a schedule and fax it around,” explained Plaster. “But it was a surprise and delight to realize that our smart phones could bring up the entire schedule.” “I think many of the doctors will like the option of having their call schedule on their phone” – it’s very convenient.

On the clinic side, Miller noted that Call Scheduler has helped them more quickly track down where providers are and better coordinate care. “We were able to take scheduling to a whole new level.” she said. “At the clinic, we use it for providers on call and for tracking who’s physically in the building. Now we know who’s here, who’s off, who’s here for half of a day...basically anything we need to know about the provider’s schedule.”

Accurate reporting and compliance

Both the clinic and the hospital use Call Scheduler for tracking and tallying reports on the number of times a provider takes call to ensure fairness and compliance.

Plaster remarked, “if we need to research a past on-call situation, we won’t need to sort through paper copies of schedules. This information will be at our fingertips electronically. The Call Scheduler will expedite the entire process!”.

To learn more about Call Scheduler please visit www.call-scheduler.com or contact us at 877-435-8826.

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