Revolutionizing SNF/LTC Workforce Scheduling:

Building Predictability and Quality for Staff and Residents

Outdated scheduling practices in resident care are leading to critical mistakes when it comes to scheduling and deploying our workforce.

SNF/LTC homes are **sacrificing quality, continuity, and stability** for staff and residents. This because we continue to work in short-term, reactive environments; throwing our hands up and saying, "there is not enough staff". In reality, there is waste, inefficiency, and a lack of scheduling quality that is **making the impact of human resource shortages worse**.

The four main issues:

1. **Reactive scheduling** - the root of the problem lies in a reactive approach to scheduling and *ignoring average PTO levels and sick time backfill needs,* and other underlying inefficiencies that exacerbate unfilled shifts.

2. **The pitfalls of inherited schedules** - inherited schedules can favor senior full-time staff, leaving part-time and per diem workers *with less desirable patterns.* This doesn't just affect morale; it hinders staff retention.

3. **Budgeting practices & staff ratios** - outdated budgeting practices, which focus on the number of positions rather than the quality of scheduling, *leads to overspending and reliance on agency staff*. This approach often results in low-quality part-time offers and a cycle of inefficient staffing and/or misalignment of skill.

4**. Flexibility vs. Predictability** - the tradition of re-creating 4-week, 6-week, 8-week schedules to give employers more "flexibility" to place PT and per diems where they appear to be needed, is not working to stabilize staffing. It is one of the *biggest barriers to advanced planning and predictability*. This diminishes continuity for residents as well.

SNF/LTC administrators can unknowingly sacrifice schedule predictability for their teams. This occurs partially because of reactive shift filling, but also as we can **buy into the urban legend** that "we" as the operator - need to hold onto - ultimate scheduling flexibility until the bitter end.

In these circumstances, *trust diminishes between employee and employer*. We fall back on mandatory overtime, constant re-deployment, and increased dependency on agency staff. The so-called flexibility that the scheduling function is built around, ends up **strangling advance shift filling into short windows**, while all hands-on deck are consumed calling out for staff calling in.

Master Long Range Schedules: Everyone Wins.

Introducing predictable, repeating, master schedules can be transformative. They **offer staff a sense of control and stability, allowing them to plan their lives** around known shifts. This predictability can reduce absenteeism, ad-hoc PTO usage, and foster greater loyalty to your organization.

	WEEK 1							WEEK 2							WEEK 3							WEEK 4							Wkend	Shift type %'s	
																													off %	D	N
	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat			
1		DX	DX	DX				DX	DX					~		NX	NX			NX	NX					NX	NX	~	50%	50.0%	50.0%
2	DX			NX	NX		~		NX	NX			NX	NX	NX			NX	NX		~						DX	DX	50%	50.0%	50.0%
3		NX	NX			NX	NX				NX	NX		~		DX	DX			DX	DX	DX			DX	DX		~	50%	50.0%	50.0%
4	NX				DX	DX	~			DX	DX			DX	DX			DX	DX		~		NX	NX			NX	NX	50%	50.0%	50.0%
5						DX	NX					DX	DX	~						NX	NX	NX					~	50%	50.0%	50.0%

A master schedule provides a repeating schedule of shifts for a group of employees over a set number of weeks. It repeats throughout the operational year. Each line on the master represents one position and one employee which helps with workforce planning and recruitment.

Master rotations are also significantly **easier to maintain** than manager-created scheduling or employee self-scheduling, because there's no need to create a new schedule every period.

Where should you start?

Evaluate your master schedule using these five tips. They are designed to guide you in creating dependable and predictable schedules for your team.

Tip # 1   Establishing a Consistent Staffing Baseline

To ensure high-quality, predictable scheduling, it's essential to **perfectly align the master schedule with operational needs and the model of care**. This involves setting a baseline for each staff type required for each shift each day. The baseline might differ on certain days to accommodate specific valid operational needs, like occupational therapy or RN availability on weekends. A well-planned rotation meets these baseline needs efficiently, **avoiding** random overstaffing or understaffing.

Tip #2   Balancing Full-Time & Part-Time roles

The proportion of full-time to part-time staff affects both resident care and staff retention. Full-time roles offer job stability and improve care continuity, as residents become **more comfortable with familiar staff.** Part-time positions, particularly those with fewer hours, offer an ability to fill gaps for PTO and sick leave, and cater to employees seeking less than full-time hours.

Tip #3   Adhering to Labor Laws & Agreements

Scheduling must comply with labor laws and collective agreements. These **"rules" may dictate** maximum consecutive shifts, minimum weekends off, or required rest periods between shifts. Details will vary given factors like staff type and shift length. Non-unionized roles must **follow applicable labor laws** regarding rest periods, shift length, and meal break conditions. Consult HR or labor relations for specific requirements in your organization.

Tip #4   Minimizing Employee Fatigue

To minimize fatigue in shift work, consider reducing consecutive workdays, avoiding single days on or off, **allowing ample time for shift changes** (especially from night to day), and preventing frequent, rapid switches between night and day shifts.

Tip #5 — Ensuring Equity, and Equality in Scheduling

Fairness in scheduling is critical. Unless special circumstances apply, all employees should equally share shift and weekend responsibilities. **A fair schedule provides each staff member** with a similar number of weekends off and day shifts, preventing unequal distribution where junior staff get more night and weekend shifts, while **popular or senior staff get plum schedules** full of preferable weekday day shifts.

Need help assessing your current schedules and implementing change? The experts at Workforce Edge have over two decades of experience in supporting SNF/LTC Administrators with workforce optimization.

Interested? Send an email to <u>info@workforce-edge.com</u>. Your staff will thank you!

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