Letterkenny University Hospital Case Study

# Improving staff management and work-life balance in line with the national safety agenda at Letterkenny University Hospital



Although the constraints on Ireland's national finances have reduced since 2010, levels of debt are still high and the impact on healthcare has been significant. This means a focus on salary management, minimising the use of agency staff as far as possible and at the same time promoting a culture of continuous improvement and innovation. The Irish government has placed a particular emphasis on rostering to ensure 'requisite staff cover is available to meet safe and efficient operational requirements' and to help staff plan their working hours in advance. The government has also committed to eliminate discrimination and promote equality for staff.

## Letterkenny University Hospital

Letterkenny University Hospital in Co. Donegal has been using Allocate Software solutions to help it meet the government's objectives and become the country's pioneering e-Rostering hospital. It has integrated e-Rostering into the everyday work of the nursing team, increasing productivity and utilisation of substantive and temporary staff which has helped to minimise the use of agency staff. It has also improved workforce planning and safe staffing by implementing a skills-based roster and increasing skills training. From the staff perspective, nurses can now book shifts in advance via mobile, helping them to plan their working lives and improve work-life balance.

## The impact of e-Rostering and SafeCare on saftey

There are 22 units now using the software to roster staff. Ward managers are using SafeCare to match skill mix to demand and the hospital has evidence that decisions it is making around staff deployment are based on patient need.

## How a focus on staff ensured success

The hospital recognised early the need to communicate its e-Rostering roll-out plans. As well as setting up a multi-disciplinary steering group, it held drop-in sessions at the same time every week as well as an e-Roster support email for times outside office hours. Michelle O'Hara-Donnelly is e-Rostering project manager at the hospital. She says: "We realised that staff needed protected time to come and talk to us and that having a presence at ward level was also important. We clear the email support inbox every morning and for most staff it is a question of helping them understand what they are seeing and reassuring them."

She believes that e-Rostering and the use of Employee Online (EOL) has improved transparency around rosters because it allows staff to see shifts in advance and book via their phones or tablets. This has improved the fairness of rosters and helped ward managers address inherited informal working patterns. "Our roster management policy is supporting ward managers make the system work better. We are now undertaking a review of roster management policies and we have had support from Allocate with this which has been a great help," she says.

One way the hospital was able to demonstrate fairness and roster effectiveness was during the two storms Ophelia and Emma in 2017/18. The Health Service Executive agreed that staff who could not attend work during the storms would be granted paid emergency leave on these dates. Staff who attended work on storm days were granted time-off in lieu for each day worked.

Calculating how much time was owed would have presented a challenge if the hospital had not been using Allocate's HealthRoster. If a member of staff had been rostered to work and then managed to come in, through the HSE arrangement they were entitled take that time back. Michelle noted that "when we looked into it, we found there were staff this applied to, and we were able to calculate time owed at the click of a mouse, and apply these hours to rosters, resulting in staff having positive or negative net balances." There were areas where staff already 'owed' these hours back to the rosters, and storm hours now being returned cancelled these balances.

As for improving work-life balance, the hospital carried out a survey to find out how Employee Online (EOL) was being used. The survey results found that just over 60 per cent used their phone to access shifts through EOL. The remainder used tablets/laptops or desktop computers. Just under 90 per cent found it easy to use and eight in ten said they felt supported in using it. In terms of improving access to leave management, 63 per cent said this had improved and 70 per cent said it had improved access to rosters.

## Better staff management and improved oversight

Michelle believes that being able to review and report on staffing provides greater visibility and also an opportunity to open up conversations with ward managers and staff about rostering. There are league tables available to roster creators and can be presented at unit level. Any member of staff can be reassured from a fairness perspective they can quickly be shown specific data to see whether staff leagues support fairness. As a result, the hospital has been able to stabilise their workforce by improving productivity and utilisation of substantive and temporary staff.

There is also greater certainty around bank staff requests. The hospital has recently appointed a Bank Staff co-ordinator who manages all temporary casual nursing staff in the organisation. Staff now can view and book into shifts remotely which means staff don't have to come in to meet / telephone the bank coordinator and the organisation can maximise fill on requests to bank.

"We know how many hours are requested and we know how many shifts we can fill with bank staff and therefore where the gaps are. By demonstrating the actual demand for hours requested we can see the need for ongoing recruitment and retention which means we don't have an over-reliance on external agency services."

## Tips for success from Letterkenny

- Ensure that every aspect of the business functions within the organisation has a shared responsibility and ownership for e-Rostering initiative
- Be clear about the business processes behind rostering, it is not just about the software system itself
- Understand how it is going to benefit staff, patients and lead to a safer more effective workforce providing the right people in the right place at the right time
- Ensure the processes that support data quality is robust. For example, data cleansing is vital to the success of e-Rostering and transparency with the HealthRoster solution demonstrates this quality
- Communicate effectively with staff to prepare them for any changes within their units and ensure involvement and training supports available
- Help staff make the most of booking shifts from home

"By demonstrating the actual demand for hours requested we can see the need for ongoing recruitment and retention which means we don't have an over-reliance on external agency services."

Michelle O'Hara Donnelly
eRostering Project Manager
Letterkenny University Hospital

ALLOCATE

Tel : +44 (0)20 7355 5555

Email : info@allocatesoftware.com