AllocateAwards Case Study

South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Sickness absence has cost the trust more than £6 million a year. A damning internal audit found services were not consistent in applying sickness policy, and that they were not documenting actions taken or carrying out reviews promptly. The trust has now made absence management one of its key corporate objectives.

HealthRoster was already capturing all sickness at the trust, but it still needed to record when staff were hitting a sickness trigger, as well as when they were put on one of the sickness management stages or were due a follow-up review meeting. It also needed to be able to highlight when managers were not acting, so that this could be escalated and addressed.

To achieve this, it set up a new SQL database on its HealthRoster server and developed queries, linking to the live HealthRoster tables, to identify when people hit one of the sickness triggers. It also set up skill types within HealthRoster and used these to record the stages people were on and the dates on which follow-up meetings took place. It then created scheduled tasks to run the queries and send automated emails at the relevant junctures.

There was some difficulty in getting managers to follow the new process, including taking the appropriate action and recording the outcomes on HealthRoster. There was an apparent misunderstanding among some managers over when they could apply discretion before using the absence management process.

The trust was able to use its new system to identify when managers were not following the process. This was brought to the attention of HR, and they met with the managers to address this. The trust now produces regular reports to highlight where the process isn't being followed.

There is now a fully integrated electronic absence management tool so managers can see, at a glance, the position of staff at each stage of the absence management process.

The trust is able to produce monthly reports on which staff have triggered but no follow-up action has taken place, which supports compliance with sickness policy.

In the last few months, the trust has expanded the system. It now sends daily email notifications to the occupational health department if someone is recorded as absent with stress, depression or anxiety, or with a musculoskeletal (MSK) problem, using the sickness data already within HealthRoster.

Agency spend on nursing staff fell 50 per cent in the first quarter of this year, and while this is not all attributable to reduced sickness absence, it does play a major role.

The trust's fast-track stress and MSK pathways, supported by the automatic daily alerts from HealthRoster, have helped reduce the average length of these episodes, and staff feedback has been positive.

Andrew Prince, HR business manager, said:

> "We are projecting a £151,000 saving on sickness absence spend across just 30 of our inpatient areas this year. The trust's sickness rate is now the lowest amongst mental health trusts in our region."