

Patients first – safe staffing through value added rostering support

In the NHS, we used to use parchment and a quill pen. Now at our trust we use SafeCare Live and the University Hospital Southampton values “Patient First, Working Together, Always Improving” are a way of life. Safe staffing is essential to providing quality patient care and rostering underpins this. SafeCare with the NHSP interface is now embedded in 90 wards, up from 54 wards two years ago, and is used every day on these wards and in daily staffing meetings. Our matrons can see, at the touch of an iPad, how poorly our patients are, which allows them to safely redeploy staff or use the NHSP bank to maintain safe staffing levels. It’s a one-stop shop for real-time safe staffing.

As well as being the evidential record of staffing needs and patient acuity and dependency data, SafeCare is central to staffing reviews and service planning. Systems shouldn’t distract from patient care, so our processes, especially pay, must be smart and seamless. We strongly believe if you treat your staff well, look after their careers, wellbeing and pay, they will be happier in their jobs, which will lead to better patient care.

Our challenge

To retain safe staffing levels and put patients first, we want to be sure every single member of staff is paid correctly first time. With this in mind, pay and absence interfacing was piloted, implemented and embedded early in our rostering journey.

Going paperless presented different challenges to those we anticipated. Historically, timesheets were completed by the employee, signed by the manager, and then sent to payroll. Suddenly decisions needed to be made about which rate to use. Unfortunately, managers weren’t familiar with Agenda for Change terms and conditions and so staff were often paid incorrectly, including overtime with net hours owing. Additionally, bank holiday leave wasn’t recorded properly so enhancements were paid and hours were assigned to TOIL – so taking time back meant employees had even more time to take back.

Our approach

Establishing a baseline

Firstly, we checked our data to see how big this problem was. After carrying out some data analysis, we found that in one month we had potential overtime overpayments of over £3,250. This meant fixing the problem would definitely be worth the effort.

Communications

We needed to let colleagues know that mistakes were being made. We took two approaches, using various media.

1. Communications for the specific areas where we had found the problems.
2. General communications to bring this to the attention of everyone, to highlight the potential opportunities for error and avoid this becoming a bigger issue.

Training

We reviewed and updated our training to make sure the problem areas were covered in more detail. We have started and are still building small bite-size modules that can be accessed as needed.

Documentation

We updated our documentation and policy to include additional information that was pertinent, such as when to pay overtime, so customers don’t need to look in multiple places to find what they need. A good example is our rostering policy, which includes the decision making, step-by-step, as part of the rules, as a flowchart and on our intranet pages

System update

We helped make it easier for colleagues to pick the right option by renaming elements and unavailabilities.

There are now three elements for paying “overtime”:

- FT overtime (for full-time staff)
- PT excess (for paying part-time staff when hours less than 150 hrs per roster)
- PT overtime (for paying part-time for their hours over 150 hrs on the roster)

and for those staff whose patterns run over multiple elements we set up an excel calculator; TOIL became “Time Owing (working hours must be ZERO)” and additional guidance has significantly reduced the number of errors.

Our achievements

Savings

Adding all the different aspects we now check, in the last financial year we avoided overpayments of more than £100,000.

Workforce Systems Payroll extract savings 2017/18	
Toil (working hours should be zero)	27007
Overtime v. excess incorrectly assigned	41839
WLI untrained v. trained rate incorrectly assigned	816
Bank holiday enhancements in error	38220
Total	107883

Additionally, we have improved the understanding of the system and the way elements are recorded, with more helpful and meaningful guidance.

We have been able to improve the relationships we have with our colleagues by working in partnership with them. One of our team was recently nominated for the employee of the month – the submission included:

“The whole team have commented on how approachable, friendly and committed Tracy is to resolving our problems. Nothing has been too much trouble. We feel that she has gone above and beyond in her role with us, not stopping until everyone feels enabled and competent to use the system. This has required a great deal of patience, as well as humour on her part. It is credit to her that she has achieved so much with us.”

Lessons for others

1 star hard – 5 stars easy

Communication ★★★

Most important is to deliver plenty of easy to understand communications. Don’t stick to one approach, use different media to appeal to the preferences of customers, e.g. videos, webinars, blogs, social media, face-to-face. This means new skills for your team, this could be extra change for you.

Guidance ★★★★★

Support communications with training and documentation. Again, use different styles as some prefer numbered lists. Others want pathways with screenshots so they see what they use. Videos, animated or otherwise, and eLearning each have their place, too.

Support ★★★★★

- Never assume you’ve got it 100 per cent right first time, though that’s your ambition.
- Change can be scary; the challenge is to remove the fear. Keep it simple.
- Make sure colleagues know who to contact if they need help.
- Make sure the support team understands it themselves.