

At a Glance

Meridian Health
Monmouth and Ocean Counties,
New Jersey

- 70 locations including four hospitals, Jersey Shore University Medical Center, Ocean Medical Center, Riverview Medical Center and K. Hovnanian Children's Hospital
- Annual system revenues of \$725 million
- 7,700 team members, and affiliations with over 1,400 physicians

Solution Spotlight

- eShift

Critical Issues

- Excessive costs in agency use
- High overtime and per diem fees
- Perceived bias in staffing decisions
- Recruiting and retention difficulties

Results

- 46% reduction in agency use
- \$1.2 million savings in seven months
- Reduced shift vacancies
- Improved staff satisfaction

Meridian Health Reduces Agency Use by 46% and Saves \$1.2 Million

Nurse managers and staff at Meridian Health, the largest employer in Monmouth and Ocean counties, New Jersey, were constantly frustrated by the difficult and costly task of filling open shifts. Paper sign-ups had to be done in person. Last-minute phone calls were time-consuming and stressful. So Meridian did what you'd expect from the first healthcare system in the nation to be awarded the prestigious *Magnet Recognition for Excellence in Nursing Services* by the American Nurses Credentialing Center. It looked for a better way to fill shifts from internal staff and give managers and nurses the power to take control of work schedules in relation to family responsibilities.

Challenges

Filling daily shifts was a struggle for nurse managers, especially because the union required all staffing decisions to be based on seniority. If someone cancelled and the shift wasn't filled with the most senior person, the hospital was required by union contract to pay the most senior person for the shift — even if that person didn't work it.

The need for improved communication between managers and staff was also a major impetus for change. Managers spent countless

hours on the phone, calling employees to fill an open shift, and then entering the volunteer's information into the schedule.

Nurses who wanted to work extra shifts had to come to the hospital to sign up, and return again to retrieve their schedules. Staff members who were off when the sign-up period was posted had to ask friends to request shifts for them.

Answer

Meridian Health found the optimum solution in eShift, a Web-based solution from McKesson that provides staff with real-time scheduling access from any Internet browser.

The organization first implemented eShift in the unit with the most nursing FTEs — the Medical ICU, CCU. Using eShift, along with concurrent operational improvements, vacancies were reduced from 24 to four. Combined with a drastic reduction in agency fees, the unit was \$12,000 under budget after just six months of using eShift.

According to Linda Walsch, nurse manager for the unit, "We no longer have union seniority issues. eShift is totally fair, and there is no bias. It's the best thing that has happened to me as a nurse manager."

Case Study

"I came in on Sunday night to train 10 people. One user claimed to have figured it out and asked to show the team. The staff was amazed at how easy it was."

Tara Claudio
Nursing Systems Manager
Meridian Health

Nurses and other staff also appreciate the ability to look through the schedule online at home. "You can sit down with your spouse and discuss your schedule," says Tara Claudio, nursing systems manager. "When you decide to pick up an extra shift, you'll know for sure that he or she can be home with the kids." Claudio also expressed how easy the system is to use. "I came in on Sunday night to train 10 people. One user claimed to have figured it out and asked to show the team. The staff was amazed at how easy it was."

Throughout the implementation, Meridian has emphasized access for everyone, ensuring that each employee can use every workstation at Meridian to log in to eShift. Even employees without computers at home can go to the library or a friend's home to quickly log in and check shifts. "Now, each individual has control over his or her schedule," Walsch says. "Staff never has to come in on their day off to see if overtime is approved because the auto messaging feature lets them know the status of each shift. And I love that I am able to get in touch with my team immediately — the communication improvement is huge!"

Richard Heimbuch, RN, BSN, CEN, Nurse Manager at Jersey Shore University Medical Center's Inpatient Oncology unit, agrees. "The automated messaging feature definitely improves our ability to communicate with staff," he says. "With eShift, there's never a question of missed phone calls or messages." In fact, eShift's acceptance within the Meridian community is so great that in times of emergency, managers have already begun sending messages through eShift before they begin to call employees. eShift can sort staff by zip code, allowing managers to locate a logical first response team.

Results

Seven months after implementation, Jersey Shore University Medical Center was already filling 47% of open shifts with 1,875 regular eShift users. With agency usage down 46%, the Meridian organization had documented \$1.2 million in savings.

In a market where average hourly rate hovers around \$30 per hour for nurses, \$25 per hour for new graduates and a staggering \$65 per hour for agency personnel, the benefits of eShift will provide Meridian Health with an ample return on investment for years to come.

McKesson Provider Technologies

5995 Windward Parkway
Alpharetta, GA 30005

<http://www.mckesson.com>
1.800.981.8601

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