

## Dispatch Box: The financial benefits of workforce management solutions

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Time and Attendance (T&A), a key component of any workforce management, has often in the past been seen as somewhat ‘big brother’, and used to enforce unpopular work regimes. However, more enlightened and forward thinking Trusts now take the approach that T&A provides fairness and transparency to workforce management that can’t be provided by other means.

As the whole of the public sector faces draconian austerity measures, the NHS needs to make savings and find new ways of working. The NHS has the delicate balancing act of driving efficiency to get the most from its staff, while maintaining care standards.

### **A long hours culture**

Work culture has evolved over the years to a more flexible one, often resulting in staff working longer hours. We may see some staff members working the system to their own advantage but this is more than offset by those who don’t. T&A systems are able to iron out these kinds of inequalities. It has long been recognised that a key to reducing absence is ensuring staff wellbeing, and one important aspect of this is to ensure that staff are able to maintain a good work/life balance and receive the correct recognition and payment for the work they do.

eRostering is a very popular way for Trusts to streamline their rosters with just over 50% of Trusts now running the systems, ensuring that the right mix of skills are on duty at any time to deliver patient care, in the most efficient manner possible. By introducing T&A as part of the workforce management process, Trusts are able to assess adherence to the electronic roster by measuring the start and end time of employees’ shifts, accounting for any last minute changes. The methods of measuring hours worked vary, and include smart cards, RFID tags and biometric readers.

T&A systems build upon the value of eRostering systems, and tend to be a second step in the evolution of a wider workforce management solution. To gain particular benefit from eRostering solutions, Trusts need to log the actual hours worked by staff and feed these automatically to the payroll system. The impact of workforce management solutions is maximised in this way. The

integration between ESR (the national payroll and HR system used by the majority of the NHS) and eRostering systems allows data to be recorded once and then is automatically transferred to ESR. As a result, data is consistently accurate. This reduces the opportunity for human error, while associated systems are seamlessly updated with the same data, saving time and effort.

A particularly valuable benefit of this integrated approach is in the recording of sickness and absence. The T&A system automatically sends details of all absence to the payroll system, which then calculates and updates pay accordingly. By linking T&A to the eRostering system and payroll, the system is able to manage all absences, not just those that were planned for.

### **Fairness and transparency for staff**

Staff also benefit hugely from workforce management solutions. The fairness and transparency, and knowing that they have been paid for work done has been proven to improve satisfaction. Staff are able to view the shifts they are due to work in advance, which allows them to plan their lives around work. Self-rostering means staff can make requests for annual leave as well as the shifts they want to work. This process is automated and recorded, which means that there is clarity over shift and leave requests.

Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust reported a positive impact in its employees from the implementation of workforce management. Gill Halsey, project manager, says: “Staff were more satisfied in the hours they work, staff retention and sickness has improved. The average reduction was 11.4%, which meant a 28% reduction in average monthly agency spend.”

The clarity and fairness that is offered through the use of T&A is an important facet in improving satisfaction for staff. By recording the shifts that they actually work, as opposed to what was initially planned, staff can be recognised and paid what they are entitled to. Where a shift is changed at the last minute, the T&A system automatically records and updates the information. Where T&A is integrated with the payroll system, staff can be assured that they will receive the correct pay. Under a manual process, if the information is updated too late staff might not receive the adjustment until the following month.

### **Cost of payroll reduced**

T&A can reduce the overall cost of payroll, by cutting the high number of errors that occur when it is performed manually. The system also reduces the cost of absenteeism, as staff awareness that their working hours are being recorded encourages greater punctuality and attendance.

Published in November 2009, the Boorman Review identified that by increasing the health and well-being of staff, the NHS can generate savings of up to £555m. While workforce management solutions are only part of the solution, they are helping Trusts to reducing sickness and absence while improving quality of work and availability and contributing to savings.

Although a change in culture may be required to get buy in from staff for T&A, it offers the potential to increase efficiency and satisfaction. Management may feel that by implementing T&A they will appear to be checking up on their staff, while staff may feel uncomfortable that their time is being monitored. It is important that all stakeholders are made aware that T&A is a tool of empowerment rather than a monitoring system, which ensures fair payment.

This is where change management, communication and education is vital, and should be started as soon as possible prior to rollout in order to ensure buy-in at all levels. To manage this risk, it is also

important that the project manager has an independent view of the situation, and will make decisions based upon what is best for the Trust rather than pandering to the existing culture. Being paid for the work completed, on time with no errors, goes a long way to keeping staff happy.

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