



Tips for Nurse Staffing Coverage During EMR Rollouts

Hospitals may need to bring in agency nurses during an electronic medical record (EMR) implementation to provide training time for staff nurses and to compensate for lower staff productivity as nurses acclimate to new technology and work processes.

Denise Deans-Graf, president of Nursefinders Staffing & SingleSource, offers tips to consider as the implementation staffing plan is being developed.

Start Early

As every nursing leader knows, a staffing agency should require its workers to undergo extensive credentialing, testing, training, and orientation specific to the client hospital before their assignments begin. Securing, relocating, and orienting travel professionals can often take four to eight weeks. Furthermore, facilities working with union representation will be required to gain approval to bring in travel or contract workers—and that can take months to achieve.

The best approach: Notify your staffing agency about your EMR plans as early as possible.

Seek the Agency's Counsel

The agency may be able to help you determine staff efficiently with agency nurses during the EMR rollout. A large healthcare organization that expected to hire 100 travelers during its EMR implementation found that its staffing agency was able to provide a mix of local and travel staff, requiring only 60 travel contracts. That saved the health system nearly \$1 million.

Consider a Train-the-Trainer Approach

In this scenario, a staffing agency provides traveling clinicians who undergo extensive training on the new EMR system before it is implemented so they can help train the staff nurses. After the facility's staff has completed classroom training, the "trainers" are used onsite to shadow permanent staff who are using the system for the first time.

This approach is sometimes used when the implementation plan calls for small numbers of staff nurses to undergo classroom training at a time, disrupting the normal staffing plan as little as possible. That means the EMR will have a lengthier implementation schedule. However, the approach can be highly effective for healthcare systems with multiple locations, allowing mobile trainers to float from facility to facility as needed.

Plan Carefully for a "Big-Bang" Rollout

Small or medium-sized facilities that wish to speed the implementation process may choose to train large numbers of staff at a time, while backfilling with traveler or local temporary workers. This approach can expedite EMR rollout. Most states require hospital units to maintain a minimum number of permanent staff alongside temporary workers so keep that in mind when the plan is being developed.

Consider Using Nurses for Training

Some organizations find success using clinicians as their primary training force rather than software technicians. While software technicians have intimate knowledge of the EMR system, they are not versed in the day-to-day functions and processes of patient care. Because nurses understand the requirements of patient documentation and bedside care, they may be more adept at training their peers in the daily use of an EMR system.