

When employees are in a time crunch, scheduling strategies can improve job satisfaction.

Innovative hospitals are implementing both low-tech and high-tech scheduling options to help employees cope with today's hectic pace.

Lovelace Women's Hospital in Albuquerque, NM, "offers flexibility so [employees] can balance work and life," said Carol Shelton, director of human resources. Nurses, for example,

can choose from 8-, 10- or 12-hour shifts. Or they can join the PRN pool and be "on call" to cover for vacations and sick days. Benefits for Lovelace staff kick in at 20 hours per week, so part-time employees can take advantage.

This flexibility is crucial in retaining employees. By 2020, there will be a projected shortage of 1 million nurses in the country, Shelton cited. Varying schedules can help fill the gap by attracting new employees while retaining baby boomers with pre-retirement plans.

Hospitals must have multiple time management resources available, Shelton said. For administrative positions, Lovelace offers limited telecommuting options. "We're open to what will work for people," she said.

'IT'S ALL DOABLE'

A few of the healthcare professionals at Lovelace shared how they have taken advantage of the work-life balance opportunities afforded them.

Louis Boyd, OTR, a certified lymphedema therapist, started as a PRN employee and averaged 20 hours per week. She was given the option of becoming a half-time employee with benefits, and Lovelace also paid for Boyd to get her lymphedema certification—both signs of the hospital's dedication to her professional growth.

"Most therapists in our department have families," Boyd said. "As long as we meet the needs of the patients, we can manage our time to go to doctor's appointments, parent-teacher conferences, etc. It's all doable."

Shannon Salazer, RN, who works in the Family Birth Center at Lovelace, started as a full-time employee in the postpartum unit, switched to part time, and then became a PRN employee in labor and delivery and the maternal-fetal medicine unit for high-risk patients.

When Salazer switched to the PRN schedule to dedicate more time to her family, the facility was "very welcoming to that change," she said.

Whether or not someone wants to increase hours on the job or pare them



"Everyone needs to have a balanced life, and that's hard in healthcare because it's 24-7." - Carol Shelton

SCOTT DERBY

down, Shelton said, managers should make sure employees are taking care of themselves. “Everyone needs to have a balanced life, and that’s hard in healthcare because it’s 24-7,” she said.

HIGH-TECH, HIGHER MORALE

Other hospitals have taken a technology-based approach to work-life balance. Managers at Alegen Health Midlands Hospital in Papillion, NE, use the software program Smart Square, offered by Avantas, for their scheduling needs. “You’re in the field for a reason and want to spend time caring for patients,” said Jackie Larson, vice president for client relations at Avantas.

However, much of managers’ time is eaten up by scheduling issues. Tami Field, ICU/CCU director at Midlands Hospital, can relate. “The last thing I want to be is a manager who sits behind a computer,” she said.

Avantas works to relieve some of that pressure. As Larson explained it, many clinicians can be subdivided into core staff—who prefer fixed schedules in the same unit—and contingency staff—who like the flexibility and variety of working in different units. Some organizations have developed an over-reliance on their core staff. It creates burnout when core staff is forced to work too much overtime. “You need to optimize different levels of staff to align with different patient needs,” Larson said.

The consulting arm of Avantas matches staff to open positions to

determine where they will be the most engaged and satisfied. The concept is to create a positive environment, and then positive outcomes will follow. One Avantas client, a 400-bed hospital, reduced overtime costs by \$824,000 in the first year.

PICK YOUR SCHEDULE

Smart Square has a self-scheduling option that allows co-workers to pick schedules. They can log in from home to pick up shifts and also request time off. “Before Smart Square, my staff would have to call around to see if someone could trade shifts,” Field said. “Now it just takes a few clicks.”

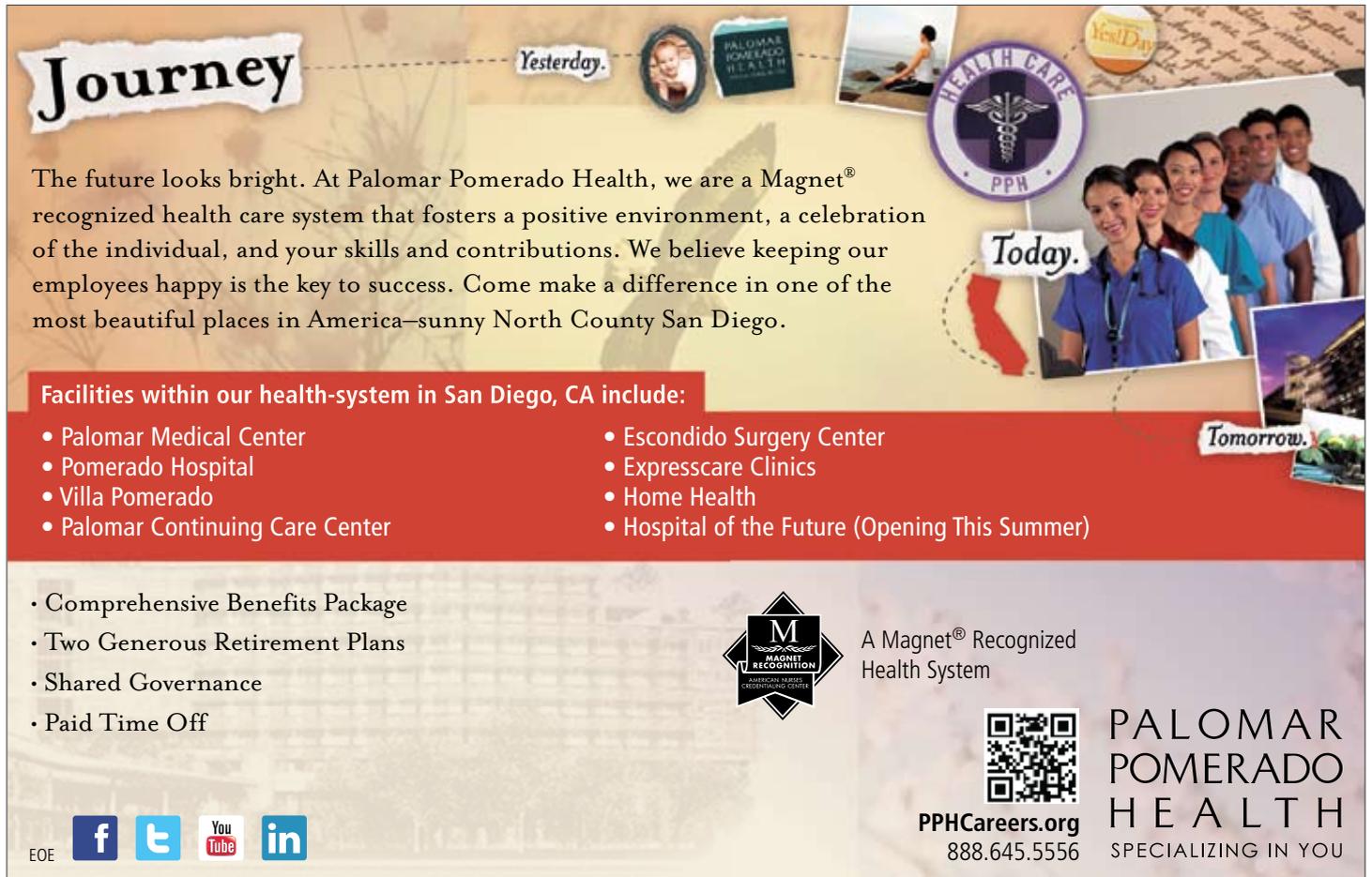
Other time-saving features include a cyclic scheduling option for more set schedules and a predictability component that estimates future scheduling needs.

“Looking ahead at the staffing boards really helps me plan when staffing is tight, and it helps me pre-plan for weekends and holidays,” Field said.

Instead of being tied to a desk with paperwork, she can focus on the hospital’s long-term goals.

New hires are blown away by the functionality of the software, Field said. “We are able to promise potential hires that their time will be appreciated and their time with their family is a priority. Work-life balance is achievable.”

Danielle Bullen is on staff at ADVANCE.



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