



Billings Clinic Staffs Equitably During COVID-19 and Magnet Journey

As Montana's largest healthcare system, Billings Clinic serves residents of Montana, Wyoming, and the western Dakotas at its 304-bed hospital and Level II trauma center and through its regional partnerships with 13 critical access hospitals and an outpatient clinic. Billings Clinic was Montana's first Magnet®-designated healthcare organization recognized for nursing excellence. The Magnet Recognition Program® also optimizes job satisfaction, resulting in lower nurse attrition and an improved patient experience.

Employees: 14,700+
Industry: Health Systems

Top Challenge

As COVID-19 cases started spreading across the U.S., Billings Clinic's leadership team prepared for an expected surge of patients as it also engaged in the organization's Magnet redesignation process. Because it had been using UKG™ (Ultimate Kronos Group) solutions to enable nurses to self-schedule and to ensure equitable distribution of patient workload based on intensity of care levels, Billings Clinic felt it was better positioned than most healthcare organizations of its size to handle the staffing demands of the pandemic.

Solutions

Solution flexibility was essential to create new inpatient units and a COVID-19 triage unit as patient demand required.

Using real-time patient data, nurse managers built schedules and staffed units to reflect appropriate nurse-to-patient ratios by shift in each unit.

Extensive prior use of the workload-based staffing solution reduced challenges in creating balanced patient assignments for nurses.

Results

Nurses in the self-scheduling units set their own schedules, increasing their engagement during a challenging and demanding time.

Workload-based staffing that reflected patients' intensity of care levels created equitable staffing assignments.

While handling the staffing challenges presented by COVID-19, Billings Clinic was also successful in remaining a Magnet-designated organization.

"Acuity-based staffing is imperative to meeting our goals and making sure we have the right staff and number of staff for the right types of patients. And we're able to give nurses a flexible schedule while making sure we have what we need to meet our patient needs."



Key benefits

- Provides flexibility to customize schedules and shifts to meet changing patient volumes and care needs, even during a pandemic
- Creates balanced patient assignments based on patient intensity, for equitable workload distribution across each unit and throughout the organization
- Supports nurse self-scheduling and shared decision making in line with Magnet-designated guidelines designed to sustain nurse satisfaction and quality patient care

Danielle Mahon, Healthcare Informaticist, Billings Clinic

Products

UKG Dimensions Timekeeping

UKG Dimensions Analytics

UKG Workload Manager for Healthcare

UKG Target Intelligence for Healthcare

UKG Scheduling

Challenges

Shortly before COVID-19 deeply affected areas of the U.S. in the spring of 2020, Billings Clinic had begun its Magnet redesignation journey of creating and sustaining a culture of excellence. The process of applying for Magnet designation is thorough and lengthy, demanding widespread participation of those in the organization. And as the organization watched the pandemic's devastating impact on other areas of the country, it prepared its equipment and staff for an expected surge, including increasing its hospital bed capacity by 25%, from 300 to 400 beds.

In the fall, the surge arrived in the 400-square-mile area that Billings Clinic serves. With patient volume and patients' intensity of care levels rising significantly, Billings Clinic relied on its UKG Dimensions™ solution to equitably distribute patient assignments relative to patients' intensity and to reallocate staff across units — as well as to schedule 200 traveling nurses over six months.

Solutions

The organization used its UKG for Healthcare scheduling solution to staff its COVID-19 triage unit and also added new units to the solution, including one just for travelers. Nurse managers had the information and flexibility they needed to build unique schedules and make informed staffing decisions shift by shift.

Newly skilled nurses floated to different units, and units shared patient care resources. The hospital's inpatient cancer unit took stepdown patients from the cardiovascular unit, which then took overflow patients from the ICU. Each unit adjusted its workload rationale guidelines to account for new patients that

nurses were caring for. UKG Workload Manager for Healthcare played a key role in balancing patient assignments based on the intensity of patient care needed — and on clinical data — as well as according to staff skills.

The solution's workload-based staffing functionality enables unit nurse managers to determine appropriate nurse-to-patient ratios based on clinical data. While some nurses were used to caring for five patients at a time, patients' increased intensity of care levels during the pandemic made caring for just three patients extremely demanding.

“We also used data on our one-to-one sitters, which we track through the scheduling area,” shares Danielle Mahon, healthcare informaticist. “All of my nurse managers know how to run reports in the scheduling solution to see their productivity and how their one-to-one hours are impacting their productivity.” Having real-time visibility into hours per patient day helps units stay within budget.

Results

As a Magnet-designated hospital, Billings Clinic is committed to empowering its nurses through self-scheduling and shared decision making, a focus that has served it well during the pandemic in retaining nurses, maintaining their satisfaction, and delivering quality patient care.

“Magnet is firm on nurses having a say in their schedules,” notes Mahon. “Dimensions allows us to do that. During a Magnet site visit, all nurses in the self-scheduling units were able to speak to how they can request their PTO and put in their schedules.”

UKG Scheduling and UKG Workload Manager for Healthcare solutions have supported Billings Clinic in meeting Magnet goals for exemplary professional practice and ongoing improvement in knowledge and innovation. Able to manage their own schedules, nurses are more engaged and are less likely to call off. A positive work environment with balanced patient assignments and workload — determined by data for each shift — also supports quality patient care.

“Acuity-based staffing is imperative to meeting our goals and making sure we have the right staff and number of staff for the right types of patients,” says Mahon. “And we’re able to give nurses a flexible schedule while making sure we have what we need to meet our patient needs.”

During its Magnet redesignation process, Billings Clinic shared stories from its COVID-19 experience to illustrate how they were able to schedule and empower nurses to maintain their satisfaction and to deliver quality patient care. UKG for Healthcare data supported the ability of Billings Clinic to achieve operational excellence.

Approximately a year after Billings Clinic began its Magnet redesignation journey — and experienced all the challenges of COVID-19 — the organization was redesignated a Magnet hospital.