

Where workforce management and quality care intersect: Q&A with Brian Graves, a Global Practice Leader in Healthcare at Kronos.



Brian Graves

Kronos may be known for their punchy timeclocks—but the company today is offering much, much more to hospitals, health systems, and long-term care organizations across the globe. Brian Graves, a Global Practice Leader in Healthcare at Kronos, discusses why there is more to healthcare information management than just electronic health records and clinical decision support. He explains how the right workforce management can help mitigate risk, reduce employee turnover and, ultimately, improve quality of patient care.

From your perspective, what are some of the biggest workforce management issues that you see in the healthcare industry?

Brian Graves: Healthcare reform is driving changes to reimbursement. Medicare and Medicaid reimbursement is changing and being directly linked to the delivery of quality of care. That connection between quality and reimbursement has become critical to the health of provider organizations. And there is a lot of pressure on them to perform well and deliver the highest quality care possible.

The right workforce management foundation can help with that. And with the right tools, you can ensure you are delivering the right high-quality staff to deliver that high-quality care.

What would you say are the biggest misconceptions that healthcare companies have concerning workforce management?

Graves: Before healthcare reform was instituted last year, you had the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) that was putting \$19.2 billion of incentives out there for the adoption of electronic health records (EHRs). We know that organizations are incentivized right now to concentrate on EHRs because there will be penalties if they're not at a certain adoption level quite soon.

What workforce management can do is help drive that effort. It's not a distractor, a loss of focus, but a driver. Healthcare organizations can ensure the success of their EHR plans because they will know that they have the right staff in place that is driving both the project and patient satisfaction. So what we see is that workforce management is just one of those underleveraged ways in which healthcare organizations can ultimately help deliver high quality care, ensure happy patients and drive revenue.

Let's talk about risk management. You argue that the right workforce management practices and tools can help mitigate risks. How so?

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Graves: There are plenty of studies that show a correlation between outcomes and staffing. We're actually investing dollars in future research to even better understand the connection between them. But if you read the current literature, you'll see a strong connection between high occurrence of overtime or agency use with a higher incidence of mortalities, injuries, falls, things like needle sticks and other errors. It's clear that fatigue and safety go hand in hand. So some of what Kronos can do is help give you the right visibility into things like overtime so managers are proactively aware when key staff is approaching it. That not only helps manage the budget more effectively but also increases safety.

From a risk standpoint, this is something we think our customers need to be looking out for. And tools like ours offer visibility to information like high use of agency, high use of overtime and other indicators of potential safety issues.

Many healthcare managers and administrators have a lot on their plate—especially with EHR adoption. How do you let them know that workforce management isn't just another box on the to-do list but something that will make their jobs ultimately easier?

Graves: From a management perspective, it's really all about giving visibility to the right information. What we can do is help managers strike the right balance. Some of our customers are using our solution to ensure that they have the right balance of novice nurses—placing those novice nurses on floors where they are balanced with

tenured or expert nurses, so that those novice nurses can get more experienced without losing quality of patient care. That, again, is something that helps mitigate risk. We have customers who are using our capability to make sure they are creating schedules with the right balance of experience—they have the right visibility for staffing and scheduling.

Others use our capability to manage productivity so they can see exactly what's going on within any given pay period. For example, a manager can look and see when they are getting close to budget. Maybe they've incurred some overtime or some shift differentials. Maybe they've used too much agency. But this visibility lets them know where they may be going over budget in terms of hours per patient day or dollars and let them make some different decisions to better manage all aspects of staff—and, in turn, better manage their financials simultaneously with quality of care for patients.

One of the things Kronos offers is help in finding “best fit” employees. What's involved with that?

Graves: Kronos has spent a number of years developing a scientific method to finding best-fit employees. What it entails is finding employees that are aligned to the employer's goals for any given job. As you can imagine, we're not always consciously aware of what exactly our preferences are. So Kronos offers a scientific approach where we work with customers to provide them assessments. They can then use those assessments to find employees who are best aligned to the organization's goals and objectives.

Here's an example of how it works—we have a set of functionality in our workforce acquisition product that allows a prospective employee to try out the job in a sense. It's an online virtual tutorial where they can walk through the role and find out what it's all about. We've

found that it helps potential employees get a better sense of what the job is and help employers see if a candidate is well-suited for the position. When you think about the costs involved with on-boarding employees, this is a big help. Because there is a significant cost to hiring someone and then finding out two months later that it wasn't a fit. This works particularly well with long-term care where you can see employee turnover as high as 60, 70 or even 80 percent.

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Where do you see Kronos going in the next five to ten years?

Graves: First and foremost, Kronos will continue to grow—throughout the nation and throughout the world. Our newest release, a color touchscreen terminal that replaces our previous timeclock is really

a departure from what anyone else is doing in this space. It not only allows a company to collect time information but also to support other applications. For example, say you are a nurse working the late shift. You can use the terminal to order a meal and then have it debited directly from the next pay period's check. Beyond that, our new user interfaces have leveraged concepts from consumer technology so they are very robust but also attractive and easy to use.

And, finally, we've created a strong platform for mobile. We can offer mobile scheduling, which allows for information to be sent via text to staff members' phones. Staff can be notified immediately when a new shift is open that they might be eligible to work so there is quick turnaround filling those shifts. And there are also mobile manager functions so that managers can review timecards and approve them quickly and easily on a device like an iPad.

Simply stated, Kronos will continue to look at what technology is coming and leverage it so we can provide the most advanced workforce management suite to our customers, both here and abroad.