

The healthcare industry is continuously evolving nowadays.

The Dutch academic hospital VUmc in Amsterdam is a good example of an innovative medical center. Not only did VUmc remodel its office buildings to show its innovative image, VUmc also strives to keep up with other operational industry developments and is improving various business processes within the organization. One of these areas is staff scheduling. In order to guarantee high quality staff schedules, VUmc has selected HARMONY, ORTEC's advanced staff scheduling software, to support their complex staff scheduling process.

VUmc: **“We do not have to be satisfied with the first schedule that comes up”**

Increased Efficiency and Flexibility

Kris Hemmink, project manager with VUmc, explains that the selection of HARMONY was a well-balanced decision. “The best way to schedule our employees more efficiently and at the same time reduce scheduling time was to automate the scheduling process. We started the selection process with the following requirements: First of all, existing labor and compensation rules are very complex. Therefore we needed a system that takes into account all relevant rules (government laws, industry rules and collective labor agreements). Secondly, the system needed to take into account our employees’ varying working hours, positions and personal preferences. A third requirement was the ability to extract valuable management information from the scheduling software. Finally, the new scheduling system needed to interface with PeopleSoft, our Human Resources system. HARMONY meets all these requirements. Even more, it increases efficiency, reduces errors and provides more flexibility in the schedules.”



- 5,000 employees
- 20,000 inpatient hospital stays
17,000 outpatient treatments
280,000 outpatient consultations a year
- unique diagnostic treatment
- scientific research
- more than 60 departments

Not Taking any Chances

“We first talked to various other hospitals to learn more about their experience regarding staff scheduling software”, Hemmink says. “We then invited a number of suppliers for software demonstrations. In the end, we chose ORTEC, not only because of the HARMONY solution, but also because they provided us with excellent service.”

Training is Everything

VUMC’s implementation team followed the basic user training on how to use HARMONY. “We attended a few intensive training days at ORTEC in Groningen”, Van Der Poel recalls. “It was a good experience and I would recommend it to everyone who is implementing a software solution like HARMONY. One of the things we learned is that each department can create staff schedules according to their specific requirements.”

Application managers Wim van der Poel and René Mulder train VUmc’s staff schedulers on how to use HARMONY. The fact that VUmc consists of many departments, all creating and managing their own staff schedules, could have complicated the implementation. That is, according to Mulder, where the value of ORTEC’s years of implementation experience and its training method comes in. “We visit each department before

training the staff scheduler and study how schedules are created and which requirements and employee preferences should be taken into account. We enter our findings into HARMONY, so that during training, the schedules look familiar to the staff schedulers. Staff schedulers then take two days of basic user training and will be ready to start working with HARMONY after that. We explain the HARMONY functionality in the morning and let the staff schedulers practice using the system. In the afternoon, the staff schedulers use their new knowledge to start setting up their departments in HARMONY and to create the actual staff schedules for implementation. Two weeks after the training, we meet again to provide guidance and answer any questions. It really works!”



“Another advantage of this training method is that staff schedulers get to know each other better”, says Hemmink. “Previously, staff schedulers were living on their own little islands within their own departments. There wasn’t much contact with staff schedulers in other departments. Now, we are setting up a designated helpdesk together with our functional administrators and so-called super-users, employees who have become quite proficient at working with HARMONY.”

Phase II of the HARMONY Implementation

Staff schedulers of about 40 out of all 60 departments have now been trained to use HARMONY. Phase II of the HARMONY implementation is about to start, which

focuses on the integration with PeopleSoft. This will enable HARMONY to export data used for pay purposes, like actual hours worked. Based on this information overtime and allowances are paid to employees.

Positive First Impression

Now that Phase I is almost finalized, Hemmink gives a first impression of her experience with the HARMONY implementation. “If I look at the staff schedulers, I see a lot of enthusiasm. Mulder and Van der Poel’s support is excellent and the software clearly provides added value. We are currently preparing a study to survey the results, but we are convinced that we are saving a lot of time. HARMONY automates a number of tasks and minimizes repetitive work. Vacation schedules have to be entered just once and are automatically integrated in master schedules. Besides this, HARMONY immediately checks whether a schedule complies with the law regarding working hours, collective labor agreements and the like.”

Efficient Staff Schedules

According to Hemmink, it is important to lift staff scheduling to the next level. “We do not have to be satisfied with the first schedule that comes up. With HARMONY we can actually focus on improving the quality of staff schedules. In the future, we want to carry out audits for quality assessment. In addition, we would very much like to implement the HARMONY Web Access module, which enables employees to check their work schedule online at home or at work and to trade shifts or enter requests for time off.”

As far as ORTEC’s contribution is concerned, Hemmink summarizes, “Without ORTEC’s experience, things wouldn’t have run so smoothly. You immediately notice that they are more than just software suppliers. The support we get is really good, which is what we had hoped for. Support was one of the reasons why we chose ORTEC. They will remain involved in the project group and steering committee as long as necessary. In the end, we have to be able to do this ourselves. Fortunately, we have done quite well so far.”

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