BEST PRACTICE GUIDE:

10 Tips to Help You Address Staffing Needs

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Overview

The most important responsibility for hospitals and healthcare facilities is maintaining a continuity of operations every day, especially during a public health emergency or a disaster. Having adequate nursing personnel during and after these events is critical to meet increased medical demands. Yet many healthcare organizations are grappling with staffing shortages among their nursing professionals, such as registered nurses (RNs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), nurse practitioners (NPs) and home health aides.

Scrambling to fill last-minute callouts or resolve ongoing understaffing is time-consuming for your organization. It also impacts your ability to care for patients and interrupts daily operations.

So how can you fill a shift in hours? Or days in advance? How can you let other nursing professionals know when an available shift is covered? Where do you find nursing personnel during an emergency? How do you meet your duty of care responsibility for your nursing staff who are traveling or working in the field?

Here are 10 ways to help you keep your hospital or healthcare facility staffed when these moments come.

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1 Know in what circumstances you'll send out a poll.

STAFFING NEEDS

WELLNESS CHECKS

WEATHER EVENTS

ACTIVE SHOOTER

TIP:

Not every situation needs a poll. Only send polls for situations that require a response.

Your hospital or healthcare facility doesn't shut down during a public health emergency or a disaster. In fact, you'll likely to see more patients after an adverse event occurs. So you'll need to know what situation you'll use your mass notification system for, and when you'll launch its polling module. An automated polling feature, which is part of your mass notification system, allows your emergency managers and other personnel to solicit information from your staff through SMS text, email and voice calls. The polling module also enables you to send automated follow-up notifications based on their responses. Consider using the automated polling feature for daily business operations, such as last-minute callouts or schedule changes, as well as situations or events that impact the health and safety of your nursing personnel and others.

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2 Determine who will send out polls ahead of time.

Before a staffing request occurs or an emergency strikes, decide who will access the system to send out polls and manage responses. Assign as few people as possible to be part of the decision-making process. If there are too many people involved, it may become difficult to make a decision or take action and important information might not get out to your employees in time.

When they send out a poll, have them include their name and title, along with a date and time stamp so your employees can keep current with the situation. If your administrators are sending a voice recording, have them use their own voice so it adds

legitimacy to the message. If it's an emergency, their voice provides a sense of calm so your employees will tune into that communication.

The designated team can send out polling requests through email, SMS text and voice calls. Through role-based access control you can limited the polling templates and lists they can send to. As polling responses come in, the team can manage shift needs, as well as monitor your nursing personnel's safety during an event.

TIP:

Select a few people who will send out a poll and set up role-based access control to provide the necessary templates and lists.

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3 Educate your employees.

Send your employees an introduction that your company is using a mass notification system that features a polling module. Notify your personnel they'll receive notifications about staffing requests through the automated polling feature. Inform them they'll also receive polls for wellness check-ins, so your emergency managers and other personnel can ensure their safety while nursing professionals are working in the field or traveling.

Let your employees know they can provide additional information, such as personal email addresses, mobile phone numbers and emergency contacts, that will help your emergency management personnel and others contact them in case of an emergency.

TIP:

Introduce your employees to your new mass notification system, as well as the polling module. Let your healthcare staff know they'll receive polls for staffing requests and wellness check-ins, if appropriate.

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4 Develop messaging for various situations.

The best way to send out polls is to create preset templates for different situations, such as staffing shortages, codes and weather events. These situations are generally stressful, so it'll take pressure off of your staff who will send out these polls. These preset templates decrease the chance of incorrect information getting out, while getting the correct information out quickly.

When you create your preset templates, think about these questions:

- **What is happening?**
- **Who needs to know?**
- **What do they need to know?**
- **How often do they need to know?**
- **What are the best ways to reach them?**
- **What action do they need to take?**

Create specific polling templates that can be sent as is with very little editing or only require fill-in-blank details, such as date and location. When you craft a poll, make the language straightforward, include any current information you have, and use directions that are easy to follow and understand. Create a question and select either a single or multiple response answer. For example, if you need RNs to work a specific shift, mention the shift, time and the date.

If an event is impacting only your hospital or healthcare facility employees and not ones who are traveling, send location-based alerts to employees in the affected area. This will prevent alert fatigue and your employees will pay more attention to the alerts that personally impact them.

TIP:

Create preset messaging templates for different situations, so it will help your administrators respond to any staffing situation quickly.
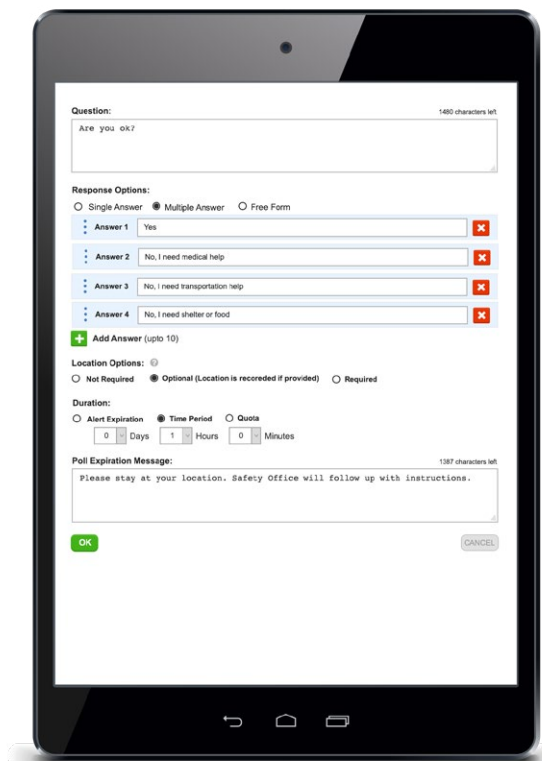
EXAMPLE OF POLL TEMPLATE:

Are you available to work the third shift tonight (10/21/18), from 11 pm-7 am?

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5 Distinguish polling types.

Figure out what information you want to collect and how you'll respond once you have it. You'll be able to set up your poll responses with either a single answer, a multiple-part answer or a free-form answer. Polls can be created for staffing shortages, wellness checks and disaster response.

- For staffing shortages, you can create a quota poll that will automatically conclude after you received the necessary amount of responses. If a nurse tries to complete the poll after it is closed, they will view a closed poll message instead.

- You can also develop quota polls that can collect the real-time location of your staff without the use of an app. For example, your emergency managers can ask where your traveling healthcare personnel are during inclement weather, if they're safe and need any assistance.

- Polls can also be created to occur within a specific time frame. For example, you have five positions available in an upcoming shift that you need to fill in three hours. Three volunteers take the shift during the 3-hour time frame, but the other positions aren't filled. The poll will be closed once these three hours are up.

You can prompt answers to all these poll methods through SMS text, email and voice calls. If you send your healthcare staff a poll through SMS text and email, they'll each have a unique link to reply to the message. If they receive a voice call, your healthcare staff can respond to your poll questions by selecting the appropriate numbers on their phone's keypad.

TIP:

Decide which poll method your emergency managers and other personnel will use in what situation.

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6   Create easy-to-understand polling language.

When you create the initial poll and the responses, keep the language clear and understandable. Structure the initial poll with simple, specific responses. Having polls with responses that are free-form, complex or multiple parts can cause confusion with your healthcare personnel, especially during an emergency.

Your nursing personnel and others can easily respond to taking on a shift or respond with their status and location. If it's necessary to offer assistance to your staff, emergency managers and other key personnel can view who they are and where they're located. Your emergency managers and others will be able to start a two-way conversation with your staff, as well as inform them about any further action.
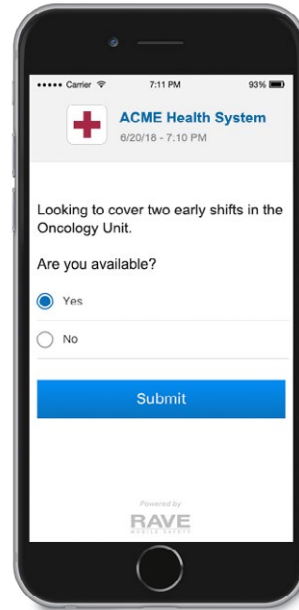
Request that your polls are acknowledged, even when your healthcare staff can't take a shift or are safe and don't require any assistance. By ensuring a response, you'll be able to dedicate your resources to informing any staff who could take a shift, helping nursing personnel who need assistance during an emergency, or locating them if they haven't responded to your initial poll.

TIP:

Keep the language for your polls and responses clear and understandable, so your healthcare staff know how to reply and what next steps to take, if necessary.

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7 Specify follow-up polling responses.

After you send out your initial poll to fill an available shift or a wellness check-in, you can collect any responses in a report. Your emergency managers and other administrators can identify your staff who can fill an available shift, need help and what type of assistance, or haven't responded to the initial poll. They can either send a follow-up alert focusing on the employees who didn't answer the poll or gave a certain answer. Your administrators can also use the responses to figure out next steps, if necessary.

In addition, your emergency managers and others can view your hospital staff locations on a map when you request or require the location through a SMS text or email response.

When you do send a follow-up poll, make it clear to your healthcare staff that it's in response to the initial poll. If you don't, your employees may think it's a repeat of the first poll you sent out and may either ignore it or be confused.

TIP:

Distinguish any subsequent polls that are a follow-up to your initial poll. It will help your nursing professionals and others know they'll still need to respond.

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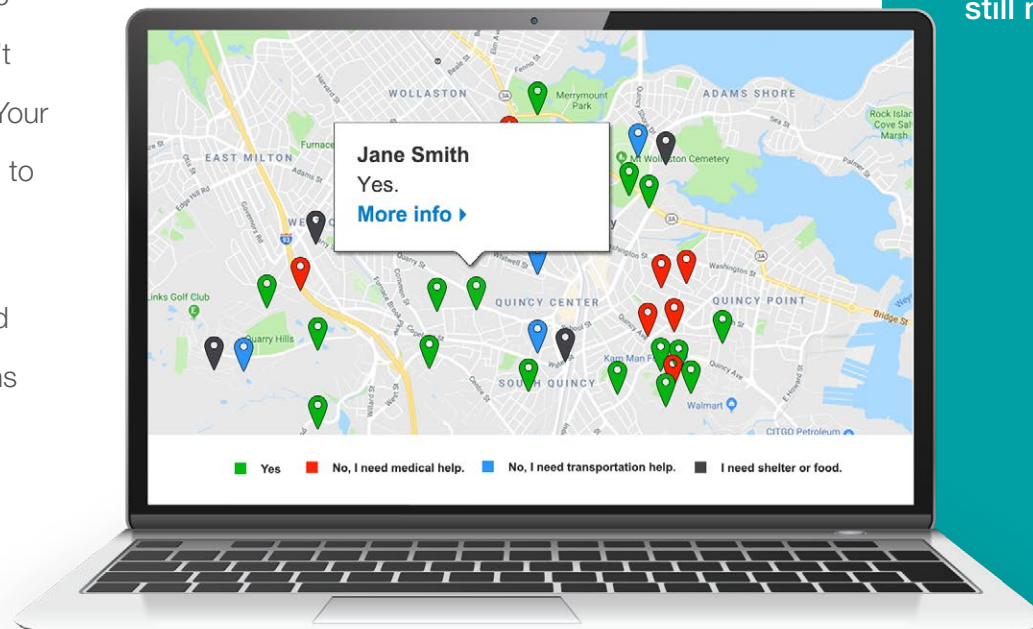
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8   Segment and inform your employees.

When it comes to sending out notifications and polls to your employees, keep in mind if you have healthcare staff who work in the field, frequently travel and work in your hospital or healthcare facility. Segment your database so the right messages get to the

right group of your employees. You don't want them to receive alerts or polls that aren't relevant to them. If you do, they may start to ignore your messages altogether or opt out of emergency alerts.

TIP:

Direct messages to specific groups of your healthcare staff, such as those who work in the field so you'll prevent alert fatigue. By segmenting messages, you'll ensure they'll receive alerts or polls that are relevant to them.

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9 Practice using your polling feature and mass notification system.

Schedule regular tests and mock scenarios, so your nursing professionals and others know what to do when a poll is sent out for last-minute callouts and shift assistance, as well as during emergencies. Send polls using different channels (SMS text, email and voice calls) to your employees so they get familiar with message formats and emergency processes.

Use the training mode in your mass notification system to simulate sending alerts and polls from the interface without actually delivering any notifications. Testing the full send flow, including pushing send, will help you identify any challenges, build confidence with your administrators, and reduce any anxiety your administrators may experience.

TIP:

Practice mock scenarios so your healthcare staff know what to do when there's a request for last-minute shift assistance, as well as what steps to take during an emergency.

ALERT TEMPLATE

Severe Weather Warning

Alert Methods

Delivery Targets EDIT

CONTINUE SCHEDULE SAVE TEMPLATE CANCEL

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10 Keep your employee information updated.

Make sure your system routinely updates your employee information, so you can identify any data issues and incorrect or out-of-data contact information. Ongoing proactive freshness checks will ensure that only current employees are on your notification list.

TIP:

Run ongoing proactive freshness checks, so you'll have up-to-date employee information, as well as identify any outdated contact information and data issues.

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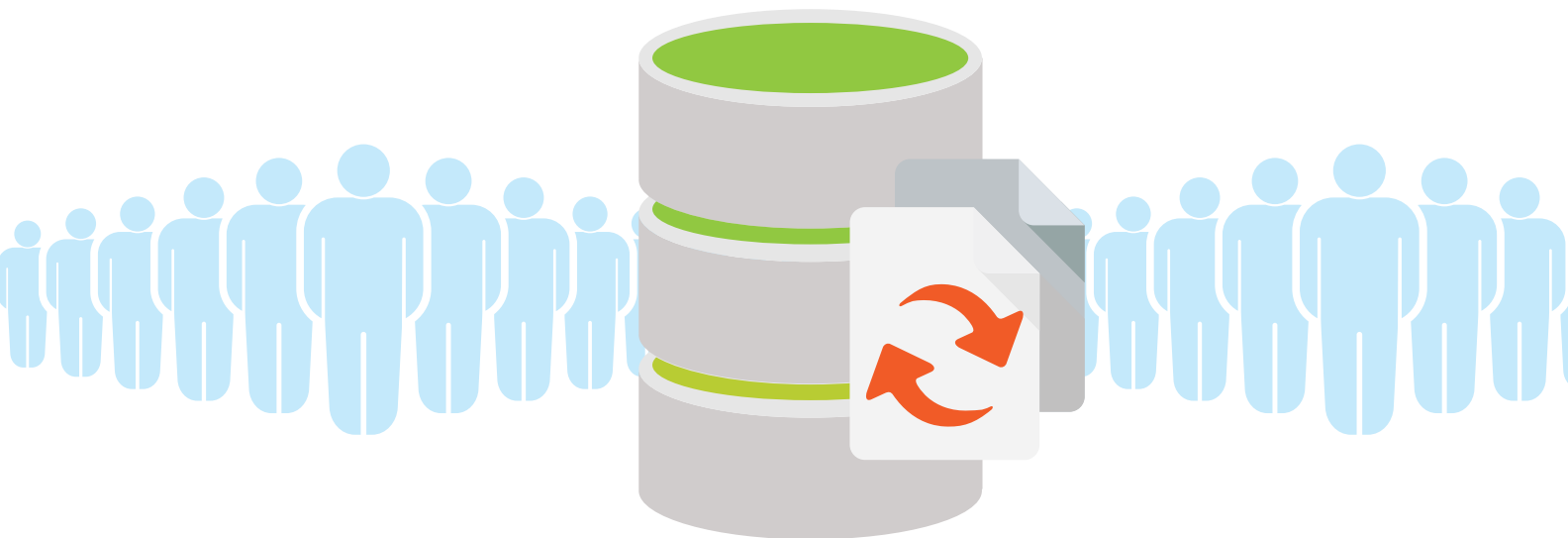
Conclusion

Hospitals and healthcare facilities are grappling with staff shortages in nursing and other related professions. Healthcare organizations have to keep their business operations going 24/7, especially during an emergency. Having the ability to fill last-minute callouts, resolve ongoing staffing needs or prepare for adverse events in a moment's notice will help you continue to care for your patients without interrupting your day-to-day operations. And you'll also be able to provide duty of care to your traveling nursing personnel anywhere they go to.

Find out what to expect when you implement a mass notification system like the Rave platform.

SCHEDULE A DEMO

Examples of Polling Templates

Would you like to work the open shift?

○ Yes

○ No

○ I will call you.

○ I'm already working.

Can you volunteer to pick up staff before the storm?

○ Yes

○ No

Can you work any of these shifts this week?

○ Tuesday, 11 pm-7 am

○ Wednesday, 3 pm-11 pm

○ Thursday, 7 am-7 pm

○ Friday, 3 pm-11 pm

○ Saturday, 7 am-3 pm

Do you need to get picked up before the storm?

○ Yes, Cambridge Street

○ Yes, Main Street

○ Yes, Shea Road

○ No, I'm all set

Are you safe?

○ Yes

○ No, I need medical help.

○ No, I need transportation.