

Pandemic Emergency Management – Challenge & Tested Solution

Challenge:

Managing Existing Staffing Resources

Solution:

Switch to 12-hour Shifts

- All full-time employees' shifts were lengthened to 12-hours per-day and 84 hours bi-weekly. All part-time employees shifts were lengthened to 12-hours and 48 hours bi-weekly (see 12hr schedule template).

Steps to Implement:

1. Participation House Durham Region engaged staff through a "Covid Committee" in discussions around how to mitigate risks etc. ***This was and continues to be effective.**
 - The Covid Committee consists of:
 - Labour mgmt. committee
 - Health & Safety
 - Frontline
 - Managers
 - This ensures staff understand the "why" behind the switch to 12-hour shifts.
2. The conversation about the switch began 2 weeks before the agency had to implement the first 12-hour shift change.
 - Staff helped co-create communication and procedures (see sample memo and shift replacement protocol sample).
 - Staff had firsthand knowledge and could identify the potential challenges from a staff lens
 - 12-hour shifts operated for 6 months
3. The agency transitioned back to this schedule when needed and provided 72 hour notice for implementation.
 - To help transition during this 72-hour period we implemented a call-in replacement procedure
 - Any shift that became/was vacant meant that the remaining 8-hour staff on shift were immediately transitioned and informed that they now had to work a 12hour shifts

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Person Consulted: Michelle Brooks, ED, Participation House Durham Region

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Results

1. How effective was this?
 - Very effective as a 3-6 month solution at the beginning of the pandemic
 - Easier to have service continuity and manage information flow during outbreaks
 - Very important to make sure the agency balances this schedule with having staff use vacation time and have time away from work

2. Benefit(s)
 - Fewer potential exposures i.e. 2 staff/day vs. 3 staff/day
 - Stretches available staff further
 - Less use of PPE due to fewer changes in a day based on number of staff donning and doffing
 - Easier for staff to coordinate things like childcare because they had more time off
 - Helped manage mental health with the increased number of days away
 - Having a schedule that was 3 days on and 3 days off, and 4 days on and 4 days off helps better control the impact of temporary-isolations due to possible exposures
 - Downside – Transition to new schedules hard on some people supported

3. Was this efficient? Was it quick to implement?
 - 1-2 weeks the first time to create, inform and implement
 - 72 hours the second time with a transition plan for the 72-hours as described under *Steps to Implement* above

4. Would you recommend this to other agencies?
 - Yes

Additional Considerations:

- Need to monitor burn-out in staff though as 12-hour shifts can be difficult especially in some of the high demand locations
- Staff are paid a minimum of 3-hours on stand-by list. This ensures staff can be quickly deployed if call-offs due to illness
- If deployed, staff received the 3h-ours pay on top of the hours worked
 - These stand-by staff can be existing staff, eternal-agency staff, students

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Lessons learned:

- Having an assigning staff for stand-by would have further alleviated pressures on our middle management team due to multiple absenteeism/vacant shifts
- When switching back to regular shift schedules, it became apparent that some programs were experiencing high rates of burnout and they found the 12-hour shifts beneficial. They requested to remain on a 12-hour shift schedule.
 - o Some people supported found transitions between staff difficult and responded well to having the same staff for the whole day.
- Every staff member needs an agency-based email address
- The “Covid Committee” is, and continues to be, key to this staffing solution. Staff “own” the switch to a 12hour shift, as they understand how it is beneficial to both their health and safety and that of the people supported.
- Staff support and stand behind solutions they help to create.
- There must be a commitment to continuous communication and correspondence from the ED desk to keep staff in the loop – agency specific, sector specific, etc.

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