



**Softworks**

*Works for your workforce!*

***Healthcare Resourcing & Rostering Challenges  
and how Technology could assist  
- Survey Findings & Analysis***

**Research Paper**

## Survey background & objectives

Softworks recently completed a survey in conjunction with [National Health Executive](#) and are delighted to share the survey results with you. We would like to thank everyone who took the time to complete our survey. The purpose of the survey was to learn more about the challenges faced by healthcare providers and how current and future technologies could be designed and developed to improve operational processes. The survey was carried out in October 2018. It was emailed to **National Health Executive's 94,000 subscribers** and promoted on their website and via social media.

## Summary of survey findings and results

### Part One – Resourcing and rostering challenges

In part one we investigated the most common challenges encountered by healthcare organisations with regard to resourcing and rostering staff. We asked respondents to read statements and indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed, that the statement described the challenges that they/their organisation encountered on a regular basis - by choosing the most appropriate response.

The available responses were strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree. For each statement we also included the option - not relevant to my role - to ensure that the results were not skewed by forcing survey respondents to answer questions on areas, topics or experiences that did not directly relate to their job type and/or responsibilities.

It will probably come as no surprise that **Staff shortages were the greatest** challenge with over 82% agreeing that they were consistently struggling with a shortage of staff available to fill rosters.

This was followed by absenteeism and last-minute roster changes (76%). Again, this does not come as a huge surprise, as according to the NHS digital report "NHS Sickness Absence Rates - April 2018 to June 2018", the average monthly sickness rates for the period January to June 2018 was 4.17%, with the highest month being January that had a rate of 5.03%.<sup>1</sup>

In general, sickness absence has actually fallen in the UK. According to the UK Office for National Statistics the average number of sickness absence days that UK workers take has almost halved since records began in 1993.<sup>2</sup> Their figures show that employees took an average of 4.1 sickness absence days in 2017, compared with 7.2 days in 1993. Sickness absence started to fall overall from 1999.

“ *Staff shortages were the greatest challenge, followed by absenteeism and last-minute roster changes.* ”

The private sector is now showing a rate of 1.7% and the public sector a rate of 2.6%. However public sector health workers still have the highest rates, coming in at 3.3%.

Balancing leave requests with care needs (75%) and dealing with peaks in care levels and finding cover (74%) were the next two most challenging areas. Following this over 60% of respondents found the following challenging;

- Determining availability for additional shifts (69%).
- Employee satisfaction with shifts and rosters (67%).
- Finding people to cover shifts from bank or agency staff at the right cost (67%).
- Too much time spent building & generating staff rosters (65%).
- Documenting skill levels, skill matching and correct skill mix at all times (65%).
- Ensuring legislative compliance (64%), ensuring fair and equal shift distribution (62%).
- Flexibility to change rosters according to patient care needs (60%).

“ *The average number of sickness absence days that UK workers take has almost halved since 1993, however public sector health workers still have the highest rates.* ”

<sup>1</sup> <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-sickness-absence-rates/april-2018-to-june-2018>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/sicknessabsencefallstothelowestratoin24years/2018-07-30>

What is exciting about this feedback is that there are challenges here that workforce management technology could definitely assist with. While technology cannot provide extra resources, it can assist with more efficiently managing the resources that you already have. For example, Softworks Workforce Management Solutions can enable hospitals and other healthcare organisations to:

- Be proactive in managing absenteeism – our solutions enable organisations to monitor employee sickness absence records for frequency and patterns and generate alerts to managers so that issues can be tackled at an early stage.
- Streamline and automate rostering processes. Easily create rosters that take into account legislative compliance, employees’ preferences, fairness of shift distribution including; bank holidays, weekends and night shifts. Map employee tasks with skills & constraints.
- Generate ideal staffing levels and visually display any gaps and identify the best personnel.
- Show accurate costing for your staff allocation including, premium rates or any overtime rules.
- Employee self service & mobile apps - Give employees’ greater satisfaction and control over their rostering preferences and organisation of their work with easy to use employee self-service solutions. Enable employees to check rosters, record their own time and attendance, request holidays and other absences via PCs, laptops, smart phones and tablets.
- Manage last minute roster changes using “Softworks Real-Time Gaps Screen” that provides a rolled-up view of any gaps you may have in your rosters.
- Fill any staffing gaps using “Softworks Vacancy Alerter” that allows you to send triggers via email and text to any available staff to request them to fill the shift.
- Once all employees have been rostered and last-minute gaps filled, “Softworks Daily Planner Screen” will provide you with live details on employees who are expected to be working along with who is due in throughout the day.

Over half of the survey respondents (52%) found it challenging ensuring that all employees work their contracted hours. 43% found not having central visibility of staff challenging and 37% found ensuring collective agreements and union rules are adhered to a challenge.

With Softworks Time and Attendance Solutions it’s easy to build a clear and central picture of employee time and attendance to ensure that employees work their contracted hours. The technology can provide detailed data and reports on hours worked, attendance, absenteeism, overtime, rostering and holiday leave.

“ *What is exciting about this feedback is that there are challenges here that workforce management technology could definitely assist with.* ”

We finished this section of the survey by asking respondents if there were any further challenges that they or their organisation are currently experiencing in relation to resourcing and rostering staff. The most common themes mentioned were based around staff shortages, recruitment, financial constraints, employee satisfaction and retention. Also mentioned was the lack of flexible working options and too much paperwork/administration. The full survey results for part one of the survey are set out in appendix 1.

## Summary of survey findings and results

### Part Two – Level of automation and satisfaction. Designing technology that meets current and future requirements

In part two we investigated how current and future technologies could be designed and developed in order to improve operational processes. We asked respondents if they currently had an automated rostering/eRostering System, what they liked/disliked about their system and if they had a magic wand what they would add to their system.

As with part one of the survey, available responses were strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree. For each statement, we also included the option - not relevant to my role to ensure the results were not skewed. 39% of our survey respondents currently

have a rostering system in place while 61% had no system in place. For those who had a system they had this to say.

- Approximately one third of all respondents who had a system (34%) agreed with the statement that their rostering system is very easy to use.
- Just under a quarter (24%) felt that their system was meeting all of their requirements.
- 19% found their supplier to be flexible and responsive to their requirements and requests for changes.
- 16% agreed that they always had a great customer experience.
- Finally, 9.5% agreed that their system is good value for money.

There were definitely mixed results in this section with some respondents happier than others with their systems. What was interesting in this section was that just under a third – 32% disagreed that their system was meeting all of their requirements. This is a great opportunity for technology providers to align themselves more closely with healthcare organisations to develop features and functions that meet their workforce management requirements. At Softworks we continually partner with our customers to develop solutions that are 100% relevant to their requirements. This also feeds nicely into the magic wand section.

### **Magic Wand – System List**

We finished this section of the survey by asking respondents if they had a magic wand what else would they like their system to do that would make rostering staff an easier process. The main wish list areas were around;

- Employee self-service/self-rostering.
- Roster automation based on availability.
- Ensuring correct skills mix.
- Making the system more configurable and user friendly.
- Rostering across the entire hospital.
- Alerts and reports with regard to working hours.
- Managing and reporting on sickness and leave requests.

For some of these areas we were both surprised and happy to see them listed. We were surprised that some organisations were using systems that did not supply these features and functions as standard, but happy that Softworks eRostering and Patient Acuity solutions can meet all of these requirements. The full survey results for part two of the survey are detailed in appendix 2.

“ *This is a great opportunity for technology providers to align themselves more closely with healthcare organisations.* ”

### **Conclusion**

The Healthcare sector is undoubtedly facing a number of major resourcing and rostering challenges due to staff shortages, budgetary pressures, a growing demand for services due to an aging population and increases in chronic illnesses, rising patient expectations and the necessity to manage and control operating costs to name a few.

In our survey staff shortages, absenteeism and last-minute roster changes were the challenges most frequently mentioned and while technology can't physically hire new staff, it can assist healthcare organisations to maximise operational efficiency and workforce productivity - while delivering an excellent patient service. This is where technology has excelled in recent years. It can also help with staff retention and satisfaction by creating a better and more flexible work environment.

Modern workforce management solutions such as Softworks eRostering and Patient Acuity solutions can assist with managing the complex balance of workforce supply with patient needs. Sustaining this fine balance requires precise daily operations.

Agile employee rostering, time and attendance and analytical insight, will empower healthcare organisations, to optimise their workforce and make changes in response to internal and external changes, in real-time. Without, having the right processes and tools in place, it is very difficult to increase the efficiency and productivity of existing resources and deliver an improved patient service.

There are challenging times ahead for Healthcare providers who will need to have an even sharper focus on the long-term than they've ever had to before, if they are going to be able to ensure they can deliver sustainable, high quality services going forward.

## Appendix 1

### Part One Full Results - Resourcing and rostering challenges.

#### Over 80% of respondents find the following a challenge

##### (1) Staff Shortages – 82% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents if they were consistently struggling with a shortage of staff available to fill rosters. 82% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 7% neither agreed or disagreed. 5% disagreed and a further 6% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

#### Over 70% of respondents find the following a challenge

##### (2) Absenteeism and last-minute roster changes - 76% find this a challenge

We asked respondents about challenges dealing with absenteeism and last-minute roster changes. 76% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 9% neither agreed or disagreed. 5.5% disagreed and a further 9.5% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

##### (3) Balancing leave requests with care needs - 75% find this a challenge

We asked respondents about challenges around the complexity of balancing leave requests with care needs. 75% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 10.5% neither agreed or disagreed. 4.5% disagreed and a further 10% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

##### (4) Dealing with peaks in care levels and finding cover – 74% find this a challenge

We asked respondents if they found dealing with peaks in care levels and finding cover a challenge. 74% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 11% neither agreed or disagreed. 4.5% disagreed and a further 10.5% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

#### Over 60% of respondents find the following a challenge

##### (5) Determining availability for additional shifts – 69% find this a challenge

We asked respondents about determining availability for additional shifts and 69% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 13% neither agreed or disagreed. 5% disagreed and a further 13% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

##### (6) Employee satisfaction with shifts and rosters - 67% find this a challenge

We asked respondents about challenges around employee satisfaction with shifts and rosters. 67% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 16% neither agreed or disagreed. 6% disagreed and a further 11% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

##### (7) Finding people to cover shifts from bank or agency staff at the right cost - 67% find this a challenge

We asked respondents about challenges finding people to cover shifts from bank or agency staff at the right cost. 67% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 8% neither agreed or disagreed. 6% disagreed and a further 19% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

##### (8) Too much time spent building & generating staff rosters – 65% find this a challenge.

We asked respondents if they felt that they were they spending too much time building & generating staff rosters. 65% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 18% neither agreed or disagreed. 6.5% disagreed and a further 10.5% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

##### (9) Documenting skill levels & skill matching – 65% find this a challenge

We asked respondents about challenges documenting skill levels, skill matching and correct skill mix at all times. 65% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 18% neither agreed or disagreed. 7.5% disagreed and a further 9.5% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

##### (10) Ensuring Legislative Compliance – 64% find this a challenge

We asked respondents about challenges ensuring legislative compliance. 64% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement.

16% neither agreed or disagreed. 7% disagreed and a further 13% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

**(11) Ensuring fair and equal shift distribution – 62% find this a challenge**

We asked respondents about challenges ensuring fair and equal shift distribution and 62% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 17% neither agreed or disagreed. 9% disagreed and a further 12% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

**(12) Flexibility to change rosters according to patient care needs - 60% find this a challenge**

We asked respondents about challenges around having flexibility to change rosters according to patient care needs. 60% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 17% neither agreed or disagreed. 7.5% disagreed and a further 15.5% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

**Over 50% of respondents find the following a challenge**

**(13) Ensuring all employees work their contracted hours - 52% find this a challenge**

We asked respondents about challenges ensuring that all employees work their contracted hours. 52% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 18.5% neither agreed or disagreed. 17.5% disagreed and a further 12% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

**Over 40% of respondents find the following a challenge**

**(14) Not having central visibility of staff – 43% find this a challenge**

We asked respondents if not having central visibility of staff across locations/ departments/ wards was a challenge. 43% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 20% neither agreed or disagreed. 20% disagreed and a further 17% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

**Over 30% of respondents find the following a challenge**

**(15) Collective agreements and union rules– 37% find this a challenge**

We asked respondents about ensuring collective agreements and union rules are adhered to. 37% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 32% neither agreed or disagreed. 11% disagreed and a further 20% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

**Further challenges mentioned:**

- **Staff Shortages** - availability of suitably qualified staff, filling rosters for hours over and above contracted hours, getting appropriate staff to work on patients when needed during emergency situations, having enough clinicians to cover core clinical sessions and the new extended access sessions in primary care, insufficient numbers of doctors, especially middle grade level and junior doctors, balancing service and training, covering sickness and other absences.
- **Recruitment** – unable to fill advertised posts, difficulty in finding experienced staff, obtaining the funding for additional posts, finding the right people that have a passion for the job
- **Financial constraints** - NHS caps, budget consideration and inability to recruit leading to employing more expensive agency staff
- **Employee Satisfaction & Retention** - Poor morale, perception of some people always covering overtime and sickness while others don't, keeping everyone happy, lack of willingness by some to offer cover at weekends and bank holidays.
- **Lack of Flexibility** - staff want more flexible options and working patterns.
- **Administration** - Too much paperwork and not enough time for hands on nursing and doctoring activity.

## Appendix 2

### Part Two Full Results – Level of automation and satisfaction. Designing technology that meets current and future requirements.

#### Our rostering system is very easy to use – 34% agreed with this statement.

We asked respondents who had a rostering system if their system was easy to use. 34% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 33% neither agreed or disagreed. 15% disagreed and a further 18% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

#### Our rostering system meets all of our requirements – 24% agreed with this statement.

We asked respondents who had a rostering system if their system meets all of their requirements. 24% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 27.5% neither agreed or disagreed. 32% disagreed and a further 16.5% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

#### Our current supplier is flexible and responsive to our requirements and our requests for changes – 19% agreed with this statement.

We asked respondents who had a rostering system if their current supplier is flexible and responsive to their requirements and their requests for changes. 19% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 35.5% neither agreed or disagreed. 14% disagreed and a further 31.5% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

#### We always have a great customer experience – 16% agreed with this statement.

We asked respondents who had a rostering system if they always have a great customer experience. 16% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 30% neither agreed or disagreed. 25% disagreed and a further 29% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

#### Our system is good value for money – 9.5% agreed with this statement.

We asked respondents who had a rostering system if their system was good value for money. 9.5% responded that they strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. 44% neither agreed or disagreed. 13.5% disagreed and a further 33% responded that this was not relevant to their role.

#### The Wishlist:

- **Employee Self Service/rostering** - Allow people to indicate sessions that they could make themselves available for at short notice, allow staff to see who is away and when, flexible enough to allow staff themselves operate and negotiate shifts.
- **Automation based on availability** - Automatically populate the roster based on who is available.
- **Easier to use** - More configurable and user friendly, easier input of information, easy to use for rotational and on-call staff.
- **Rostering** - Be relevant for staff across the entire organisation rather than just nursing staff, rolling rota so staff are aware in advance of who they are working with and the flexibility to swap shifts if required, understanding skill mix, juggle a roster with doctors and advanced nurse practitioners.
- **Working Hours** - Clearer warnings regarding hours, ability to calculate TOIL (time off in lieu) and show people their balance and timesheets,
- **Sickness management & Leave requests** - able to cope with multiple different leave requests, manage and report on sickness absence.



## ABOUT SOFTWORKS

Softworks assists Healthcare organisations including; public & private hospitals, care homes & nursing homes and home care & community care providers, to deliver high-quality, cost effective care within budget, while focusing on your most important resource - your people. Our eRostering & Optimisation, Patient Acuity & Bank Staff Management, HR, Employee Self Service, Time & Attendance, Flexible & Mobile Working and Absence Management Solutions have been designed to address the unique challenges of healthcare organisations. Softworks can provide you with a completely automated workforce management environment. We can help you to manage complex rostering, drive efficiencies, cut costs, reduce absenteeism and ensure regulatory compliance, while simultaneously delivering exceptional patient care.

For further information about Softworks Healthcare Solutions:

eMail us : [hello@softworks.com](mailto:hello@softworks.com)

or

Visit us : [softworks.com](http://softworks.com)