
PROMISING PRACTICES IN STATE SURVEY AGENCIES

Issue Brief: Team-Based Scheduling Practices in State Survey Agencies

Introduction

Team-based scheduling is a practice that shifts the responsibility of scheduling facility surveys from state agency supervisors to surveyors. This model of participatory management, or shared decision-making, decentralizes authority and equips surveyors with a greater sense of control, factors that have been found to enhance employee motivation, performance, and job satisfaction (1-4). Surveyor collaboration in developing schedules that address multiple requirements, preferences, and needs also can reinforce team bonding and promote positive interpersonal relations and a sense of camaraderie, additional factors found to contribute to job satisfaction and retention (2,5).

Summary of State Examples

This issue brief describes team-based scheduling practices utilized in the state survey agencies in Alabama, Idaho, Mississippi, and Nevada. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff.

The key features of the team-based scheduling practices at the featured agencies, their impact, and lessons learned from the agencies' experiences are summarized in this section. Detailed information for each state's practice is presented in state-specific descriptions.

Key Features

The four team-based scheduling practices vary with regard to operational features and degree of surveyor autonomy and supervisor involvement. The Alabama and Mississippi agencies both shifted the scheduling responsibility to newly established permanent long-term care surveyor teams. In Idaho and Nevada, where teams with varied composition are utilized, the full group of surveyors assemble to develop the survey schedule and assign team members for each survey.

Surveyors develop monthly survey schedules in Alabama, Idaho, and Mississippi, and quarterly schedules in Nevada. In Idaho, Mississippi, and Nevada, scheduling is accomplished during a dedicated scheduling meeting held as a component of required staff meetings at the agency office, while Alabama surveyors independently determine when to meet for scheduling. The scheduling meetings average 30 minutes in Mississippi, 45 to 60 minutes in Idaho, and two hours in Nevada. Surveyors are responsible for assigning a team leader for each survey in all but Alabama, where each team's team coordinator serves as team leader or assigns the role to another team member. In all four states, supervisors provide surveyors with facility lists for the scheduling period as well as scheduling guidelines and parameters, including CMS requirements. Supervisors actively participate with surveyors in the scheduling meetings in Idaho and Nevada. In Mississippi, surveyors independently meet to accomplish scheduling and consult with supervisors as needed, while surveyor teams develop the schedules independently of supervisors or managers in Alabama. Supervisors have final review and approval authority for the schedules in all four state agencies.

Impact

Agency management in all four states indicate that, through team-based scheduling, the agency has maintained or improved their capacity to effectively and efficiently accomplish the survey workload and has experienced multiple benefits in personnel-related areas, as described in this section. Evidence of team-based scheduling's impact at the four state agencies, however, is largely anecdotal, drawn from observations of supervisors and management staff as well as informal verbal feedback from surveyor staff.

Management staff at all four agencies believe that team-based scheduling has contributed to increased surveyor job satisfaction, teamwork, and morale, and anticipate a positive effect on staff retention. Agency management in Alabama has observed decreased surveyor absenteeism, enhanced efficiency, and increased motivation perceived to be associated with a greater sense of ownership and teamwork among surveyors due to scheduling involvement and membership on permanent teams. Enhanced surveyor motivation and efficiency also are perceived by supervisors in Idaho, Mississippi, and Nevada.

In Alabama, Idaho, and Mississippi, the team-based approach is reported to have substantially reduced supervisor time dedicated to creating and revising schedules. Although supervisor scheduling time has not been reduced in Nevada, supervisors believe surveyor involvement in scheduling is more effective and less complicated than the past method, resulting in fewer schedule iterations and greater surveyor satisfaction with schedules. Supervisors in Idaho and Nevada commented that surveyor involvement results in a schedule that more effectively accommodates surveyor preferences and personal commitments, and also necessitates fewer iterations. Agency management in Mississippi indicate that team-based scheduling has increased the number of surveys conducted each month, allowing the agency to more effectively meet required time frames.

The four agencies report that surveyors have been effective in developing practical schedules that meet indicated parameters and requirements, with only minimal need for supervisor intervention or modification upon review. Supervisors from two agencies also note that assignments from peers (e.g., for team leader) are often better received than assignments by supervisors.

Supervisor adjustment to team-based scheduling has been a particular challenge in Alabama, where surveyor teams, provided with a list of facilities to survey in a year's period, develop monthly schedules independently of supervisors until final supervisor review. Surveyor teams in Alabama also may decide when to complete

written documentation of findings, within CMS parameters, without supervisor input. In Mississippi, after an initial adjustment period, supervisors adapted to the new approach, particularly as the surveyor teams began to master the scheduling process. Agency management in Idaho and Nevada report that supervisors adjusted easily to surveyor involvement in scheduling; in both agencies, supervisors actively participate in scheduling meetings and may intervene to guide decisions during the scheduling process. Nevada agency management commented that fully transitioning the scheduling responsibility to surveyors, independent of supervisor involvement, would require substantial training.

Lessons Learned

Particularly for agencies implementing a team-based scheduling model with minimal supervisor involvement, as in Alabama and Mississippi, agency management note that it is critical to adequately forewarn and prepare supervisors for the transition and support them as they adjust to their decreased control over scheduling decisions. An important consideration for agencies is how best to balance surveyor autonomy and supervisor loss of control. Alabama agency management encourages reinforcing with supervisors that they retain the authority to hold staff accountable through standard mechanisms such as performance evaluations, employee counseling, and disciplining employees who do not accomplish assigned tasks.

Agency management in Idaho and Nevada, where supervisors participate in the surveyor scheduling meetings, recommend that supervisors strive to be open to surveyors' suggestions, and avoid imposing their own approach. Supervisors have found surveyors to be vocal during meeting discussion, including volunteering their peers for the team leader role.

Effective preparation prior to the scheduling meetings helps ensure clear communication of facilities to be surveyed and required time frames. In addition, management staff at the Idaho agency note that the planning process is

facilitated by obtaining surveyor leave requests well in advance of the scheduling meeting.

Conclusion

Based on the four variations of team-based scheduling described in this issue brief, it appears that the practice can be effectively implemented in agencies that utilize permanent surveyor teams as well as in smaller agencies with variable team composition for each survey. The agencies report that surveyors adapted fairly quickly to the scheduling task and are effective at producing schedules that meet required parameters. Agency management indicate that the capacity to effectively and efficiently accomplish the survey workload has been maintained or improved under this scheduling approach. The agencies have implemented team-based scheduling practices

with varying levels of surveyor independence and supervisor involvement, to suit the agency environment and management preferences. Regardless of the type of model employed, team-based scheduling is perceived by management staff in the featured agencies to have positively affected surveyor job satisfaction and morale as well as performance in terms of teamwork, motivation, and efficiency. The reduction of supervisor time committed to scheduling, observed in three of the featured states, also can contribute to enhanced agency efficiency and effectiveness. Although it appears that the decrease in supervisory control is an area to be carefully addressed, the agencies' management staff believe the team-based scheduling practice will contribute to a positive work environment and improved surveyor retention.

References

- 1 - Jansen PGM, A Kerkstra, HH Abu-Saad, J Van Der Zee, 1996. The effects of job characteristics and individual characteristics on job satisfaction and burnout in community nursing. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, 33(4):407-421.
- 2 - Kaye B & S Jordan-Evans, 2000. Retention: Tag, You're It! *Training & Development*, April, p. 29-34.
- 3 - Spreitzer G, 1997. A dimensional analysis of the relationship between psychological empowerment and effectiveness, satisfaction, and strain. *Journal of Management*, September/October.
- 4 - Employee empowerment: A crucial ingredient in a total quality management strategy. <http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/1848/org.html?200524>.
- 5 - Syptak JM, DW Marsland, D Ulmer, 1999. Job Satisfaction: Putting Theory into Practice. *Family Practice Management*, October.

This document is part of an issue brief on team-based scheduling practices in state survey agencies. The issue brief is one of a series by the Division of Health Care Policy and Research, University of Colorado Health Sciences Center, for the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) highlighting promising practices in state survey agencies. The entire series is available online at CMS' Website, <http://www.cms.hhs.gov/SurvCertPromPractProj>. The issue briefs are intended to share information about practices used in state survey agencies and are not an endorsement of any practice.