Team-Based Self-Rostering Guidance

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1. Introduction

Team-based self-rostering is a ‘bottom-up’ approach to scheduling work, giving people more control over the pattern of their working week. Parameters are set by agreeing in advance the levels of staff and skill mix required hour-by-hour throughout the working day. Staff put forward the times they would like to work and times they would like to protect away from work. This information is then used to compile shift patterns that match individual preferences as closely as possible, whilst maintaining agreed levels of cover at all times. There may be no requirement for staff to work their ‘contracted hours’ on a weekly or indeed monthly basis. Self-rostering programmes can enable staff to ‘bank’ hours worked over or under contractual hours. Hours can then be taken back or extra hours borrowed as dictated by the personal circumstances of staff. Self-rostering can lend itself to all staff groups within the NHS, and works best in a large mixed team where there is a variety of personal circumstances among staff, and different preferences about work patterns.

Team-based self-rostering is one of a number of approaches to flexible working. This guidance should be read in conjunction with the full range of NSS flexible working provisions. Should members of staff have any difficulties with understanding any aspect of this guidance, or require further information in respect of accessibility, interpretation or application of this guidance, they should contact HR, their Line Manager or Staff side Representative.

2. Benefits of team-based self-rostering

Benefits for staff include:
- More control over the scheduling of their own working lives;
- A stronger voice in the planning of team activity;
- Previously unrecorded extra time at work is noted and carried forward in a “time bank”;
- Linking start and finish times more efficiently to travel and family care arrangements;
- Opting for fewer, longer shifts where appropriate (within the requirements of the Working Time Regulations);
- Being able to attend appointments without losing a whole shift; and
- More discretion to be at work for significant events in patient care.

Benefits for the NSS include:
- Potential conflicts and tensions over shift allocation may be reduced;
- A better match between staffing levels and delivery of care;
- Development of a stronger team spirit;
- An opportunity to review the match between staff resources /care needs, and the potential for new care initiatives, such as evening and weekend clinics, extra theatre sessions, etc.;
- Improve retention of staff (once staff have worked in a self-roster environment, very few want to give it up); and
- Reduced reliance on agency/bank staff.
Benefits for patients and users include:

- Better motivated staff ensuring better quality of care;
- More effective use of staff resource to deliver more care;
- Improved access to care through extended work patterns.

3. Implementation Guidelines

There is no single way to structure a project to introduce self-rostering that will prove successful for all. However, the following critical success factors have been identified:

3.1 Ask the team
The first step is to assess the support among staff for team-based self-rostering. Although there are benefits to the service in implementing a successful scheme, its first purpose is to give staff more control over when they work. There may be differences of opinion among existing staff about how desirable this is. But the scheme’s impact on future recruitment and retention should also be considered.

3.2 Explore the key questions
In discussions with staff, these questions need to be considered:

- Would staff value more flexibility in their working lives?
- Will there be any effect on the delivery/continuity of patient care and how can a gain in quality of care be ensured?
- Will it help to retain existing staff and recruit new staff?
- Will it reduce absences and the need for bank or agency staff?
- Will it be fair to all?
- Could it impact on equal opportunities policy?
- Will a computer system be required or will a manual system work?
- Will it affect overtime or unsocial hours earnings?
- How will handovers be managed if there aren’t clear shift changes?

3.3 Set the parameters
Before a team-based self-rostering scheme can be introduced, principles and parameters must be agreed. These will include:

- Agreeing minimum and maximum staff levels for each hour of the day;
- Agreeing skill, grade and if necessary gender mix, hour by hour;
- Agreeing “veto” hours and any “core” hours;
- The preferences for hours to be worked by each team member of the team;
- Protected time periods for each member of the team when they specifically do not want to work; and
- Agreed limits as to how much time owed or time owing can accrue to each team member.

3.4 Compare agreed staffing levels with actual establishment
Is there a match between required staffing levels and staff available? If there is a mismatch, what steps can be taken to correct it?

3.5 Select an operating system
The operating system which processes staff requests and produces the rosters is a key element. This can be done manually with pencilled preferences input to a shift card and then confirmed in ink. Various computer systems will automatically process the information from staff to produce recommended rosters. However, computer programs
may be difficult to program where complex skill mixes have to be achieved, and require basic keyboard skills from staff. Some form of manual system is probably desirable in the early phases of implementation, and for smaller or less complex teams. Questions to consider are:

- Are all team members comfortable with using a computer-based system?
- If not, what support or training can be given?
- Where could the computer(s) be sited to give all team members access?
- Will it be possible to integrate the computer system into existing organisational IT systems?
- Is IT support available?
- Who will be responsible for putting in the time it takes to prepare a roster manually from information supplied?

3.6 Trial the system
A time limited trial will give team members a taste self-rostering. Evidence suggests that three months is the minimum period for the effect to be assessed; six months will provide a better picture of how well it works. All members of the team should be given the opportunity to express their views during this trial. At the end of the period, the effect of the scheme can be assessed:

- What is the general team view?
- What has been the staff’s uptake of the scheme?
- Have patients expressed views?
- Are any individuals unhappy with the scheme and, if so, for what reasons?
- How has the service been affected?

It may be appropriate to trial the scheme with a “team within the team”, but it should be large enough to make the trial a valid basis for assessment.

3.7 Implement and monitor
Given that problems identified in the trial can be resolved, the scheme can be carried forward, but it will be important to continue to monitor staff attitudes to its operation.

- Do team members want it to continue?
- Have patients or the service been affected?
- Are modifications needed?

Communicate the initiative to other teams, if it is successful. Self-rostering will work effectively where these factors are present:

- Effective team working
- Sensitivity to individuals’ working time requirements within the team; and
- Managers with good leadership skills.

4. Earnings
Any intention to alter pay through changing shift patterns should be negotiated through the normal channels, to avoid rejection of a system that would suit both staff and the organisation. Increased flexibility may take some staff into or out of periods that attract enhanced payments.

Some groups may not have worked unsocial hours in the past and therefore not attracted additional payments. Increasing flexibility for those groups raises the issue of whether such additional payments should be made. If so, the pay budget could increase significantly.
5. Training

There may be a need for training for managers and staff in the following areas:

- An understanding of the concepts and cultural changes involved in self-rostering; and
- Techniques for managers to assess the scope for flexibility balanced with the preferences of individual staff within the agreed parameters.

Each initiative will need to consider how to provide training in the self rostering system and who should provide it.

6. GUIDANCE REVIEW

This guidance will be reviewed two years from its effective date to ensure that arrangements put in place are appropriate to the operating requirements of National Services Scotland (NSS).

Date Guidance is effective:

Reviewed by:

Agreed by: Date: 16.5.20