
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

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Team-Based Scheduling Practices

Alabama

Summary

The Bureau of Health Provider Standards at the Alabama Department of Public Health initiated a team-based approach to scheduling long-term care facility surveys in Spring 2004, following the establishment of permanent surveyor teams. The surveyor teams independently develop monthly schedules, with subsequent supervisor review and approval. The team-based scheduling practice was initiated as part of an effort to change the agency culture by providing employees with greater decision-making responsibility and autonomy.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of Alabama's team-based scheduling practice for long-term care surveyor staff, its impact, and lessons learned that might benefit other agencies considering implementing a team-based approach to scheduling. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff.

Background

After establishing permanent surveyor teams at the request of surveyor staff, the survey scheduling responsibility was shifted from supervisors to the surveyor teams.

The team-based scheduling approach is part of an effort to change the agency's culture to promote employee empowerment and team building, with the goals of decreased absenteeism; greater job satisfaction, morale, and retention; and enhanced surveyor efficiency and motivation to effectively conduct work responsibilities. Agency management believes that increased surveyor influence over their work enhances the attractiveness of the surveyor position and can contribute to increased competitiveness in recruiting and retaining effective surveyors.

Intervention

The agency's 24 long-term care surveyors are assigned to five permanent teams, although agency management plans to continue hiring and

training surveyors to establish a total of seven teams. Team membership is assessed and modified annually by agency management, to monitor and ensure optimal team dynamics and effectiveness.

Supervisors assign each survey team a set of facilities to be surveyed over a one-year period. The teams independently develop monthly schedules, which are submitted for supervisor review. If supervisors find a schedule unacceptable, they inform the team of the difficulty and the team resolves the issue. Teams are responsible for effectively accomplishing the necessary surveys in the allotted time periods, in accordance with written scheduling guidelines and requirements provided by agency management.

Surveyors work 40-hour weeks and are required to assemble in the Montgomery office twice each month for trainings and meetings. The teams otherwise schedule their own on-site survey and office time, including arranging for monthly scheduling meetings. A team coordinator oversees each team and actively participates in surveys. The team coordinator may serve as the team leader for surveys, or may assign others to the team leader role.

Implementation

Agency management announced the implementation of permanent teams and team-based scheduling to surveyors during a staff

meeting. Team membership was initially established by the surveyors themselves. Teams included an effective balance of disciplines and experience levels, and therefore were not modified by supervisors. Supervisors met as a group and assigned nursing homes to each team.

Impact

Agency management believes the transition to team-based scheduling has contributed to increased surveyor morale, decreased absenteeism, and improved retention, although it is difficult to attribute these positive outcomes to any single factor, given the recent implementation of multiple additional changes (e.g., leadership and supervisor changes, career ladders, lift on freeze of merit raises). Surveyor motivation and efficiency are perceived to have increased as a result of making surveyors partners in meeting workload requirements.

Prior to implementing the new scheduling approach, surveyors' preferences for particular facilities had been a frequent source of conflict between supervisors and surveyors, and absenteeism was common for certain facilities' surveys. By creating permanent teams and assigning each team a group of facilities, surveyors recognize their responsibility to work as part of the team to accomplish surveys even in those facilities viewed as less desirable.

Surveyors typically are effective in developing schedules that meet agency management guidelines, with supervisors providing only occasional instruction to address identified problems. Supervisors have been freed of the substantial time committed to creating and revising schedules, allowing them to focus on supervisory tasks such as coaching teams, training, and leadership activities. Supervisory

resistance and discomfort, however, has been a challenge to implementing the new scheduling approach. Supervisors continue to struggle with loss of control over surveyors and meeting milestones, given the degree of autonomy provided to surveyors. The approach compels supervisors to rely more heavily on the standard performance appraisal and disciplinary system for monitoring and guiding surveyor performance.

Agency management plans to continue team-based scheduling for long term care and assisted living surveyors on a permanent basis in view of the anticipated long term benefits to surveyor retention, motivation, and efficiency.

Lessons Learned

Agency management emphasizes that organizational and culture change require the support of the highest levels of authority. In addition, it is important that agency management carefully balance surveyor autonomy with supervisor loss of control, and to thoroughly discuss planned changes with supervisors and support them as they adapt to reduced control over surveyor decision-making. Supervisors should be encouraged to utilize mechanisms for holding staff accountable, such as performance evaluations, counseling employees, and disciplining employees who do not accomplish assigned tasks.

Contact Information

For more information about the team-based scheduling practice at the Bureau of Health Provider Standards, Alabama Department of Public Health, please contact Rick Harris, Director, at 334/206-5366 or rharris@adph.state.al.us.

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Idaho

Summary

The Idaho Bureau of Facility Standards implemented a team-based approach to scheduling long-term care surveys in the 1990s as a strategy to improve surveyor retention and strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of the survey scheduling process, formerly a supervisory responsibility. The agency utilizes variable team composition for each survey, with surveyors and supervisors assembling monthly to schedule surveys and assign survey teams for the upcoming month.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of Idaho's team-based scheduling practice, its impact, and lessons learned that might benefit other agencies considering implementing a team-based approach to scheduling surveys. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff.

Background

Supervisors initiated the transition to team-based scheduling to increase surveyor influence over the location and timing of survey assignments, with the goal of increasing job satisfaction and retention. Team-based scheduling also was intended to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the scheduling process by involving the multiple perspectives of a larger group as a mechanism to ensure attention to all scheduling variables and minimize the need to revise the schedule.

Intervention

Long term care surveyors include 13 full-time positions and two to four temporary, part-time staff, with all surveyors based in the central office in Boise. Survey team composition varies for each survey. Surveys typically are scheduled for alternate weeks each month, referred to as "out-weeks", so that all teams are conducting on-site surveys during the same weeks.

Surveyors meet midmonth to schedule surveys for the subsequent month. Surveyors are required to submit leave requests to supervisors by the 10th of the month prior to the requested leave, to facilitate scheduling decisions. Prior to the scheduling meeting, the supervisors e-mail an agenda to all surveyors, with information on the designated survey weeks and the facilities to be surveyed during each out-week.

The first 45 to 60 minutes of the monthly team meeting is dedicated to scheduling. During this time, the facilities for each out-week are listed on the blackboard and team leaders and team members are noted for each survey, as determined by group discussion. Supervisors participate in the scheduling meeting and may intervene to ensure that each survey team includes an effective mix of clinical disciplines, and experienced and newer surveyors. Supervisors also assist with considering facility-specific factors to ensure that teams are suited to address potential challenges.

Impact

The team-based scheduling approach has empowered surveyors to influence their work environment, in terms of participating in surveys in preferred locations (whether complementary to personal travel plans or simply by personal preference), avoiding overnight travel to accommodate personal commitments (e.g., doctor's appointment, evening commitment), and working with particularly compatible colleagues.

Supervisors are comfortable with team-based scheduling and perceive that the approach has reduced friction among surveyors, strengthened teamwork, increased job satisfaction, and enhanced morale. Agency management also believe that retention rates have been positively affected.

The team-based scheduling practice has reduced supervisor time dedicated to scheduling and results in a schedule that more effectively accommodates surveyors' preferences and personal commitments, and necessitates fewer revisions.

Lessons Learned

Agency management recommend obtaining surveyor leave requests for the coming period

well in advance of the scheduling meeting, to allow accurate planning in terms of the number of surveyors and facility size for each out-week.

The agency has found that team-based scheduling can be implemented effectively without permanent surveyor teams, at least in their circumstance of a relatively small number of surveyors, based out of a single office.

Contact Information

For more information about the team-based scheduling practice at the Idaho Bureau of Facility Standards, please contact Loretta Todd, Co-Supervisor, Long Term Care Program, or Lorene Kayser, Co-Supervisor, Long Term Care Program at 208/334-6626 or by e-mail at ToddL@idhw.state.id.us or KayserL@idhw.state.id.us.

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Team-Based Scheduling Practices

Mississippi

Summary

The Division of Health Facilities Licensure & Certification at the Mississippi State Department of Health implemented a team-based approach to scheduling long term care surveys in Spring 2005, following the establishment of permanent survey teams in Fall 2004. The two changes were implemented with the goals of improving surveyor job satisfaction and retention, strengthening survey consistency, and enhancing the efficiency of the survey scheduling process.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of Mississippi's team-based scheduling approach, its impact, and lessons learned that might benefit other agencies considering implementing a team-based approach to scheduling surveys. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff.

Background

Permanent teams were designated in Fall 2004 to address observed issues of inconsistency across surveys and interpersonal conflict among surveyors, both of which appeared to be associated with variable team composition for each survey. Team-based scheduling was introduced several months later as a strategy to reinforce team bonding, empower surveyors with decision-making authority, and enhance the efficiency of the survey scheduling process.

Intervention

The agency's 26 long-term care surveyors are assigned to five permanent teams. Although the majority of the surveyors work from home-based offices, all are required to participate in a monthly on-site prep meeting at the agency office in Jackson. Scheduling for the upcoming month is accomplished by individual teams during the monthly meeting, and typically requires approximately 30 minutes of team discussion. Each team surveys approximately four facilities each month. Teams designate a team leader for each survey during the scheduling process and

ensure this responsibility is rotated among team members. Teams consult with a supervisor to assist with resolving problems, as necessary.

Each team receives a list of facilities due for surveys, compiled in advance by supervisors who ensure that required time frames are considered, and a calendar with the date of the on-site prep day for the coming month and other predetermined commitments already designated. When assigning facilities to teams, supervisors consider surveyors' past association with facilities (e.g., employment as a Director of Nursing or nurse consultant) to avoid potential conflict. Teams must schedule a small number of facilities to meet CMS' off-hour survey requirement, with survey start times in the early morning, evening, weekend, or on a holiday. Because several long-term care surveyors also are qualified to survey ICF/MR facilities, the affected teams must accommodate one to two ICF/MR facility surveys each month. Managers identify other necessary parameters in the scheduling documentation provided to teams. Schedules are submitted to a supervisor for final approval.

Implementation

Composition of the permanent surveyor teams was determined by supervisors. Teams were designed to provide balanced representation of surveyor expertise, clinical training, and survey experience; surveyor strengths and weaknesses; effective interpersonal relationships; complementary surveying approaches; and region of residence, particularly given the telework

status of the majority of long term care surveyors.

Supervisors guided the surveyor teams through the scheduling process when team-based scheduling was first initiated. The teams assembled in a conference room, one team per table. Each team received a list of facilities and a calendar for the coming month. The majority of surveyors adapted quickly to the process, although some initial challenges included assigning appropriate facility sizes to most effectively accommodate surveyor leave requests and allotting sufficient time to complete written reports.

Impact

Surveyors have provided positive verbal feedback regarding the transition to permanent teams and team-based scheduling. Agency management perceive that team bonding and greater control over work schedules have contributed to enhanced job satisfaction and morale, and anticipate a positive influence on surveyor retention.

The surveyor teams have been effective overall in scheduling surveys to meet indicated parameters and requirements, requiring minimal schedule modifications during supervisory review. Supervisors note that assignments from peers (e.g., for team leader) are often better received than assignments by supervisors.

Agency management perceive that the consistency of permanent teams has resulted in greater consistency across surveys. In addition, the combination of permanent teams and team-based scheduling has increased the efficiency of the scheduling process, due to substantially reduced supervisory time commitment to scheduling and a streamlined process.

Agency management report that the permanent team and team-based scheduling practices have

increased the number of surveys conducted each month, allowing the agency to more effectively meet required time frames.

Although they support the surveyor empowerment associated with team-based scheduling, supervisors had to adjust to the resultant loss of supervisory control.

Lessons Learned

Agency management staff emphasize the importance of ensuring the support of supervisors prior to implementing permanent teams or team-based scheduling.

With regard to assigning facilities for team scheduling, agency management has observed that supervisor efforts to consider the surveyors' region of residence and individual and team preferences regarding volume of overnight travel is valuable to surveyor morale.

When first designating team composition, management advise avoiding pairing surveyors who frequently conflict and challenge one another in their observations or determinations of survey findings. At the same time, it is important to assure that teams are effectively balanced so that no individuals dominate decision-making on deficiency citations, and to establish a mechanism for monitoring and investigating the reasons for notable variability in volume of cited deficiencies across teams, to ensure that observed variation appropriately reflects facility problems rather than team or dominant surveyor behaviors.

Contact Information

For more information about the team-based scheduling practice at the Mississippi Division of Health Facilities Licensure & Certification, please contact Marilynn Winborne, Acting Director, at 601/576-7326 or marilynn.winborne@msdh.state.ms.us.

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Team-Based Scheduling Practices

Nevada

Summary

The northern office of the Bureau of Licensure and Certification at the Nevada State Health Division implemented team-based scheduling in early 2004, transitioning from the traditional supervisor-driven model of scheduling facility surveys. Supervisors initiated the change with the goal of increasing surveyor involvement in the decision-making process, enhancing staff morale, and heightening surveyor awareness of the timelines and requirements for completing surveys. The agency utilizes variable team composition for each survey, with surveyors developing schedules on a quarterly basis.

Introduction

This report describes the structure and functioning of Nevada's team-based scheduling practice, its impact, and lessons learned that might benefit other agencies considering implementing a team-based approach to scheduling surveys. The information presented is based on interviews with agency management staff.

Background

Supervisors had been receiving complaints from surveyors regarding difficulty accommodating personal commitments due to changes in travel schedules. At the same time, agency management staff were seeking ways to improve the surveyor position, particularly given the high volume of overnight travel typical in northern Nevada. The scheduling process therefore was changed to center on surveyor discussion and decision-making, with the basic provision that the assigned workload be accomplished in specified time frames.

Intervention

The northern Nevada office employs 8.5 surveyors, who are cross-trained to conduct surveys for multiple facility types. Teams of two to five surveyors conduct long-term care facility surveys, with variable team composition for each survey. The agency does not utilize permanent teams or permanent team leaders.

All surveyors, whether office- or home-based, assemble at the regional office on a quarterly basis for a one-day staff meeting. A two-hour segment of the meeting is dedicated to scheduling facility surveys for the upcoming quarter.

Prior to the scheduling meeting, supervisors prepare a list of the facilities to be surveyed during the upcoming quarter, to ensure that CMS-required time frames are met. During the meeting, supervisors use a laptop and screen to display the facility list and a calendar for the quarter. The surveyors assign facilities to particular weeks and particular surveyors, based on group discussion of preferences and needs. Surveyors identify potential scheduling difficulties and develop solutions. Teams may choose to work 10-hour shifts if a shorter week is preferred. The rotating team leader role is assigned during the scheduling meeting by self-selection or by surveyor peers. Supervisors participate in the scheduling meeting and have final authority over scheduling decisions.

Impact

Although team-based scheduling does not alter the volume or frequency of surveyor travel, the approach allows surveyors greater influence over when and where they will participate in overnight travel, resulting in increased flexibility and ability to accommodate personal commitments and preferences. The scheduling meeting also provides an opportunity for the home- and office-

based surveyors to interact outside of facility surveys.

Supervisors report that the team-based scheduling approach has contributed to enhanced morale and job satisfaction, as well as stronger team bonding and coordination. Supervisors perceive greater willingness among surveyors to volunteer to cover for one another to accommodate personal commitments.

Although supervisor time dedicated to the scheduling process has not been reduced, supervisors have found the team scheduling approach to be more effective and less complicated for supervisors than the past method, resulting in fewer schedule iterations and greater surveyor satisfaction with schedules. Supervisors believe that significant training and support would be necessary to fully transition the scheduling process to the surveyors without supervisor involvement.

Lessons Learned

Agency management emphasized the importance of supervisor preparation prior to the scheduling meeting, to ensure clear communication of facilities to survey during the quarter and required time frames. Supervisors should strive to be open to surveyors' suggestions, and avoid imposing their own approach. Supervisors have found surveyors to be surprisingly vocal during meeting discussion, including volunteering their peers for the team leader role.

Contact Information

For more information about the team-based scheduling practice at the northern office of the Bureau of Licensure and Certification at the Nevada State Health Division, please contact Barbara Cavanagh, Health Facilities Surveyor IV, at 775/687-4475 x 230, or BCavanagh@blc.state.nv.us.

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