



# Transforming healthcare with centralized AI-powered scheduling

## Why people matter in your digital strategy

Employee scheduling in healthcare is uniquely challenging. Compared to most other industries, the stakes are exceptionally high. Scheduling directly affects patient care, and it's an essential ingredient in workforce efficiency and effectiveness, and employee satisfaction and quality of life.

In recent years, many healthcare providers have focused on improving efficiency and agility through digital transformation efforts. However, workforce management—and employee scheduling in particular—has remained one of the last frontiers for such

investments. In some of the largest providers in the country, it's not unusual to find scheduling still being done using manual, decentralized processes, often on paper or in Excel spreadsheets.

Technologies such as the UKG Pro Workforce Management™ solution are designed to replace these inefficient, decentralized, manual processes with AI-powered automation and a more effective scheduling model.

The reasons to upgrade are clear and compelling. Decentralized manual processes limit visibility into systemwide labor performance, hindering the organization's ability to accurately forecast and meet demand for patient care. They can create administrative burdens and increase labor costs with unplanned overtime, underutilized capacity, and excessive reliance on external agencies.

The impact on employees is no less consequential. Manual scheduling processes can contribute to

employee frustration, resentment, absenteeism, and high turnover. In a recent survey, half of all frontline healthcare workers said they were dissatisfied with their overall employee experience and 77 percent said they felt burned out.<sup>1</sup> In the face of growing labor shortages and a new generation of workers who prioritize flexibility and work-life balance, healthcare organizations must focus on employee satisfaction and retention, alongside efficient allocation of human resources—or put quality of patient care at risk.

## The centralized scheduling model

With a centralized scheduling model, a single dedicated team manages staffing and scheduling decisions across the entire healthcare organization, eliminating the need for separate departments or individuals to handle these responsibilities. It provides a single, standardized set of workflows, processes, and technologies to help streamline operations, provide consistency, and lower costs.

Not every organization's culture supports a fully centralized scheduling model, and hybrid approaches can be used where department leaders retain some of the responsibilities while still leveraging the processes, technologies, and resources of the central office.

Whether completely centralized or hybrid, the model provides complete, real-time visibility into schedule balance, workload leveling, and resource allocation across the entire healthcare organization. This enables healthcare leaders to understand the efficiency of resource usage and to develop and implement strategies for cost containment and improved patient care.

1. "Perspectives from the Frontline Workforce: a UKG Global Study", 2024.



# Empowering employees through self-scheduling

Employee self-scheduling is a key feature of the centralized scheduling model—and a key component of employee satisfaction. Once staff level requirements are established, employees can select the shifts they would like to work. The system automatically enforces how many shifts must be selected, any weekend or other day-of-week requirements, skill or certification requirements, as well as requirements based on collective bargaining agreements, seniority, or other labor policies. The system also enables employees to negotiate their own shift swaps, again with policies and requirements automatically enforced.

An argument we often hear against centralized, AI-assisted scheduling is a belief held by front-line scheduling managers that “no one knows my people better than me.” A corollary to that belief is that employees may fear that they will become just a number in the system, thrown into a centralized staffing pool, and assigned without regard for their individual circumstances, needs, or preferences.

The truth, however, is just the opposite. Optimizing schedules to account for employee preferences, organizational policies, labor costs, and patient care requirements can be an extremely complicated process. Without a centralized, data-driven scheduling solution, the individual circumstances, needs, and preferences of each employee are often codified on Post-it notes, tucked away in the minds of schedulers, or overlooked entirely. Policies and their enforcement may be uneven across departments. Cost optimization may be an afterthought, if it’s accounted for at all.

A centralized scheduling system not only empowers employees to express their scheduling preferences, but also assures that, at a minimum, those preferences are acknowledged and respected to the extent possible when a schedule is built and balanced to account for costs, organizational policies, patient care requirements, and the preferences of all other employees.

Self-scheduling preferences can be used for more than just indicating desired days off. They can be used to help avoid employee burnout, for example, by supporting appropriate cross-department staffing, such as allowing an employee to split time between a high-stress cardiac intensive care unit and a less stressful cardiac step-down unit. They can be used to help reskill or upskill employees by carving out time for training or cross-training. And because the system tracks employee skills and certifications, it can help keep them working at the top of their license or skills.

Float teams benefit as well. When a healthcare organization has a broad view of which employees are eligible to work in certain units or facilities, there is more flexibility to ensure both schedule preferences and care demands are met.

Employees are clearly hungry for such control. According to a recent survey of frontline healthcare workers, 86 percent said that “flexible scheduling/self-scheduling” was their most desired work arrangement.<sup>2</sup>

2. “Perspectives from the Frontline Workforce: a UKG Global Study”, 2024.

# Eliminating bias and promoting equity

A centralized scheduling system can also help to eliminate bias in scheduling. Even just the perception of bias can be demoralizing for workers, and in the absence of reliable policy enforcement, accidental oversights can easily be interpreted as inequity.

Respecting and rewarding seniority or tenured employees with preferred schedules or shifts, for example, is a common practice in healthcare. But such preferential treatment can often be applied on an ad hoc basis—a scheduling manager might subconsciously favor tenured staff when building a schedule, for example. Without proper balance, resentment can quickly build when those without seniority are required to work all of the less desirable shifts.



Even if the policy is formally codified, inconsistent enforcement can also create an undercurrent of inequity. You may have a policy that employees must work a certain number of Fridays in a scheduling block, for example, or that if an employee calls off on a scheduled weekend, they must make up the absence by working another weekend within six weeks. But without a consistent unbiased enforcement mechanism—a reliable system for tracking actual days worked against the policy—it's easy for schedulers to miss these individual cases, and it's unlikely you'll see any affected employee voluntarily reminding them.

Whether actual or perceived, inequity can be a recipe for turnover, especially in job markets where many healthcare professionals can easily find other work. The costs are significant. By one estimate, registered nurse (RN) turnover alone costs the average facility upwards of \$9 million annually.<sup>3</sup>

3. Honey Ong, "Hospitals See 100% Staff Turnover Every Five Years," Scrubs Magazine, January 2, 2023.



# Managing “silent” holidays

The highest call-off dates are not always the obvious ones—Christmas, Thanksgiving, or Super Bowl Sunday, for example. The day after Easter, the day after Mother’s Day, even the second Monday in August often make the top-ten list,<sup>4</sup> but every healthcare organization may find it has its own set of these “silent holidays.”

A data-driven system can help identify such call-off patterns, enabling organizations to develop and enforce policies to address them—employees might be allowed to choose two silent holidays per year, for example. This can help departments get out ahead of what are now often costly surprises and last-minute efforts to convince others to pick up shifts by begging for favors, disrupting planned days off, and requiring premium or overtime pay.



4. Kathy Morris, et al., “The most common days for people to call in ‘sick’ aren’t what you think,” Fast Company, January 20, 2020.

# How KPMG can help

KPMG can help you implement a centralized or hybrid scheduling model powered by a UKG workforce management solution to help you increase productivity, improve employee morale, and deliver consistent, patient-centric care.

By leveraging a UKG workforce management solution, we can help you with technology-enabled transformation—not just a technology migration. Our approach begins by identifying opportunities to help increase value, revenue, and profit. We evaluate staffing and scheduling policies, and look for ways to reduce manual processes, administrative burden, and labor costs. We assess how productivity is currently tracked and explore improvements and ways to empower people to make smarter, data-driven decisions.

We then help you leverage the capabilities of your new UKG workforce management solution to seize these opportunities and realize the full potential of this powerful solution.

## 1 Enhanced scheduling

Create accurate, best-fit schedules based on skills, certifications, employee roles, and patient volume and populations.

## 2 Optimized planning

Proactively plan staffing based on patient intensity and workload, and better optimize labor costs with increased productivity, lowering overtime costs, and reducing last-minute call-offs that can frustrate employees.

## 3 Empowered staff

Empower employees to help manage their own schedules with mobile device support. They can easily swap shifts, express their preferences or availability for certain shifts, and be more likely to get the days off that they request.

## 4 Administrative efficiency

Help reduce the administrative burden for scheduling, and give managers and schedulers enhanced, real-time visibility into schedule performance, with analytics that empower them to confidently make impactful, data-driven labor decisions.

## 5 Improved productivity

Help enhance productivity by simplifying administrative tasks and improving staff engagement, with tools to monitor and improve employee performance, leading to better patient outcomes and higher staff satisfaction.

# Why KPMG

KPMG is a recognized leader in healthcare, with years of experience working with major hospitals, health systems, pharmaceutical companies, and public health organizations globally.

Our teams are assembled and cross-trained to have a clinical, operational, and systems implementation background. In addition to system architects, data and analytics professionals, and change management professionals, they include people with real, frontline healthcare industry experience who understand you and the transformation you're trying to achieve.

Our alliance with UKG has provided our business and engineering professionals intimate knowledge of the UKG Pro Workforce Management solution. It also gives our team access to UKG professionals and technology resources that could help accelerate the project and extract greater value from the UKG solution.



# Why UKG

At UKG, our purpose is people™.

UKG (Ultimate Kronos Group) understands that healthcare is undergoing transformative change, and an exceptional employee experience is critical in supporting your mission to deliver quality patient-first care. Our purpose-built, AI-powered HR, payroll, workforce management, and culture solution for healthcare solution helps you attract and retain talent, improve operational efficiencies, and deliver a superior employee experience. That's why more than 3,500 hospitals, including 100 percent of the Fortune 500 healthcare organizations and 95 percent of U.S. News & World Report Best Hospitals use UKG. **Learn more at [ukg.com/healthcare](https://ukg.com/healthcare).**



# Contact us

Talk to our team about how we can help you improve workforce efficiency, lower costs and increase employee satisfaction.



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