



WHITEPAPER



# Combating Your Health System's On-Call Provider Challenges

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Historically, provider on-call scheduling has presented numerous challenges for health systems due to the transient nature of being on-call, the use of antiquated and archaic scheduling processes by administrators, and the likelihood of provider burnout from poorly moderated work-life balances. The implications of these aspects have shown to lead to adverse patient outcomes, decreases in provider and healthcare personnel productivity, higher rates of early provider retirement, and, as a result, declines in provider coverage.

In this whitepaper, we'll discuss how **digital on-call scheduling platforms** can benefit your health system's operations, physicians, and patients by:



INCREASING  
SCHEDULING  
VISIBILITY



REDUCING  
PROVIDER  
BURNOUT



CREATING  
SCHEDULING  
EQUITY



IMPROVE  
PROVIDER  
SATISFACTION



ENSURING  
ADEQUATE  
COVERAGE



INCREASING  
WORKFORCE  
PRODUCTIVITY

But first, what are some of the specific significant challenges common amongst health systems as it pertains to on-call provider scheduling? How do these challenges specifically affect the providers involved, enterprise goals, in addition to patient care and outcomes? Are other factors and inputs affected by on-call provider scheduling practices, which could ultimately produce unintended complications to a patient's continuity of care, decreases in enterprise revenue, or other adverse repercussions for all those involved?

# Breaking Down the Challenges Presented by Common On-Call Provider Scheduling Practices

## CHALLENGE NO. 1

### Maintaining Up-to-Date On-Call Provider Schedules When Using Manual Documentation and Other Antiquated Measures

Far too common is the use of archaic on-call scheduling practices within health systems. In these scenarios, administrators manually draw up their on-call provider schedules on paper documents or Excel files, only to have to use copious amounts of whiteout or editing when unexpected changes occur. Furthermore, when edits are made, schedule integrity is compromised. This is due in part to the subsequent communication required to inform departments and providers of the changes.

#### Downstream Effects of Manual On-Call Scheduling Processes

- Confusion lapses in coverage
- Frustration amongst providers and administrators
- Time wasted managing on-call schedules
- The potential of adverse patient outcomes<sup>1</sup>

A recent Ponemon Institute study titled *The Economic and Productivity Impact of IT Security on Healthcare* focused on the ill effects of outdated, manual communication processes, including on-call scheduling. “An average of 45 minutes [is wasted] due to the use of outdated communication technologies<sup>2</sup>,” the study stated. The constant restructuring of provider on-call schedules requires extraneous administrative time and energy, meaning time is wasted that otherwise could be applied to other duties that improve productivity.

And while this estimate of time wasted from outdated communication technologies may not seem substantial, in the long-run, it can have far-reaching implications on administrative productivity rates and the ability to access up-to-date provider schedules when needed most. Without using modern, intuitive, and practical on-call scheduling processes throughout your health system, these problems are sure to manifest.

## Helping Providers Maintain Positive Work-Life Balance While Consistently Being On-Call

In fact, the rate of burnout averages between 50 and 80 percent, irrespective of specialty or location<sup>3</sup>. The direct implications of such high rates of burnout have led to early retirements by physicians, the physical or mental manifestation of physiological diseases amongst providers<sup>4</sup>, overall provider shortages, and increased costs amongst health systems as they've been forced to fund recruitment and replacement efforts to replace providers who've tapped out. Additionally, burnout physicians are less likely than others to pursue educational opportunities or extra Continuing Medical Education (CME), curtailing the development of those physicians<sup>5</sup>.

The truth is work-life balance for physicians, and other healthcare providers, isn't necessarily about working less, but instead that work and home life don't interfere with each other in harmful ways. So what can be done to help promote improved work-life balance when the prospect of cutting back on-call hours isn't a viable solution?



### Negative Impacts of Unbalanced Call Schedules on Providers

These outcomes are due in part to stress caused by long working hours, night shifts, holiday shifts, and weekends in clinic:

- Poor work-life balance
- High burnout rates
- Increased injury potential
- Decreased cognitive performance
- Lower rates of satisfaction

The answer to this question lies in using intuitive and practical on-call scheduling software that leads to several beneficial and optimal outcomes, including:

- Less schedule juggling by administrators
- Real-time provider schedule updates
- Fewer call center interruptions and last-minute switch request
- Overall better-rested and cognitively inclined physicians

Without a digital scheduling solution for your on-call providers' work-life balance, medical errors are more common, patient livelihoods and outcomes are in flux, operational efficiency takes an unnecessary hit, and provider shortages are likely.

## Impact on Patient Care and Outcomes When Using Ineffective On-Call Provider Scheduling Practices

According to the *Journal of Occupational Medicine*, consistent and **ineffective on-call scheduling of providers resulted in the most prevalent reason for sleep deprivation** amongst anesthesiologists<sup>6</sup>. Additionally, sleep deprivation has been linked to poor communication between providers, other healthcare personnel, and patients, further exacerbating the likelihood of negative patient outcomes.

“Sleep deprivation may affect mood to a greater degree than it affects cognitive or motor performance, and, thus, may have a significant effect on a physician’s ability to communicate effectively,” the *American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology (ACOG)* stated recently<sup>7</sup>.

Likewise, excessive daytime sleepiness was the most detrimental consequence of ineffective on-call scheduling in a study conducted by the *Annals of Thoracic Medicine*. In the study, the journal stated that **long hours worked on-call, along with weekend shifts, negatively affects a provider’s ability to care for a patient and communicate with colleagues**<sup>8</sup>. It’s no surprise then that with current on-call scheduling practices in place, something must be done to avoid providers harming patients. On-call scheduling is not going anywhere, so the problem must be addressed head-on with modern and applicable solutions.

The answer to this challenge can’t be more clear for health systems. “Clinical stability [is a] significant factor that affects on-call physician workload,” echoes the *Journal of Medicine (Baltimore)*<sup>9</sup>. And further, “... capturing the unpredictable on-call workload may be possible through the collection of relevant real-time clinical information.”

The way to achieve clinical stability and **improved patient care** is through the use of digital scheduling for on-call providers, including real-time access. Without stability and real-time visibility, patients, who depend on quality care from providers, will suffer.

The use of ineffective on-call scheduling practices for providers has been proven to lead to several adverse outcomes, including:

- Substantial rates of provider burnout
- Decreased cognitive performance
- Excessive daytime sleepiness
- Potential for injurious effects to patients
- Decreases in provider productivity

## Disjointed Communication and On-Call Scheduling Integrations and their Effect on Patient Safety

System integrations within healthcare settings have become the norm as health systems, hospitals, and private practices attempt to optimize interoperability, productivity, and workforce efficiency. However, too many of these entities use communication platforms that are poorly integrated with their scheduling software and don't allow those benefits to become a reality<sup>10</sup>.

When administrators aren't able to effectively and efficiently contact the appropriate provider at the right time, not only does workflow productivity go out the window, but so does optimal patient care. This tenet is no more true than with on-call provider scheduling and the subsequent communication channels necessary to ensure patients are in good hands by healthcare professionals<sup>11</sup>. Furthermore, on-call providers are commonly needed at a minute's notice, especially in emergency departments. This means **health systems, hospitals, and private practices must have their provider communication platforms intimately and effectively integrated with their on-call scheduling software** to ensure the best outcomes.

According to the Agency for Healthcare and Research, communication issues result in the largest contributing factor to sentinel events or adverse patient outcomes resulting in patient injuries or, even death. "Clinician communication [issues] are consistently the most frequent contributor to sentinel events reported to the Joint Commission," the National Institute of Health reports<sup>12</sup>.

By integrating on-call scheduling software with communications platforms, patient care and outcomes drastically improve, on-call provider workforce productivity increases, and provider satisfaction rates go up. With patient safety at risk, health systems and other clinical settings must ensure their communication platforms are effectively integrated with an on-call scheduling platform, one that allows for administrators to know exactly who to call at the right time.





# One Clear Choice for On-Call Scheduling to Benefit Providers, Patients, and Health Systems as a Whole

Operational efficiency, work-life balance amongst on-call providers, and optimal patient outcomes are entirely possible by effectively analyzing current on-call scheduling processes and practices in place within your health system. By employing digital on-call provider scheduling solutions, your organization will immediately see improved provider satisfaction across the board, increasingly positive outcomes with patients, and, overall, greater workflow efficiency.

**Find out how QGenda On-Call and QGenda Advanced Scheduling can assist your health system with your on-call provider scheduling challenges.**

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