What are the main challenges hospitals and point-of-care centers face when it comes to scheduling providers and maximizing their resources?

The obvious challenge right now is that people are sick. You have health care workers who are on the front lines of this crisis who are disproportionately affected. They’re exposed more frequently, so they’re more likely to become sick. That has created a lot of challenges. If resources aren’t available to care for your patients, then that immediately puts a strain on your hospital.

The solutions health care organizations use for scheduling really vary. There are hundreds of scheduling applications available, but the irony is Microsoft Excel is probably the most popular scheduling tool in hospital systems throughout the country. The complexity of scheduling is such that it requires flexibility in a product. In the case of Excel, its strength is its flexibility.

Despite its flexibility, how does Excel prevent hospitals and point-of-care centers from being more efficient when it comes to scheduling?

Excel easily adapts to the user, but the challenge is that on its own it’s not capable of solving anything. It still requires cognition on the part of the scheduler. One of the challenges that has been exacerbated now is the need to schedule frequently. It takes time to put a schedule together. You need to think about the qualifications of the individuals who are going to be on the unit, the construction of the teams based on each person’s skill set, whether certain providers are even available to work and their risk profile when it comes to being placed on a COVID unit. It is important all these constraints are kept in mind when producing a schedule.

What technology capabilities do health care organizations need? How can AI, in particular, benefit them?

Applied AI, and specifically, automation of provider scheduling, is an opportunity to leverage powerful but small footprint technologies to solve existing health care problems. These solutions have wide application, from optimizing PPE distribution and availability to producing sophisticated planning for ramp up and down of expensive surgical capabilities. Coupled with existing APIs, an Applied AI system becomes an integrated part of the IT ecosystem and can solve for current and future crises.

Many hospitals and health care organizations are overstretched, especially now. How can they balance modernizing their technology with improving care delivery?

It really comes down to improving the experience for the provider so they can deliver better care. The role of IT systems is to assist, and not be an additional burden. Certain technologies, like clinical decision support, have the potential to transform health care, but are more risky to implement because they directly interface with patient care. However, technologies focused on optimizing scheduling for health care providers largely have been overlooked. There has been more focus on improving the patient experience — and rightfully so — but improving the experience of the people who provide care will enable them to deliver better care. Implementation of such a system ranges from out-of-the-box readiness to full integration with existing scheduling systems. Our Applied AI technology solutions are engineered to meet the hospital system where they are on their automation journey.

About Red Hat
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