



Healthcare Workforce Technology

CASE STUDY

Disrupting the status quo: How Henry Ford Health is driving the hospital staffing model of the future

Challenge: Like most health systems, Henry Ford Health faced nursing shortages and high agency costs long before the pandemic. As early as 2013, they knew increased agency reliance had become financially unsustainable as a long-term strategy. They saw the 'internal agency' model as the way forward and needed to operationalize a high-functioning internal float pool for cost containment and a modernized, scalable approach to changing workforce demands.

Solution: For more than a decade, Henry Ford Health has been fueling their Best Choice Float Pool with an Internal Resource Pool from Hallmark. Through the power of tech-enablement that includes mobile connectivity alongside automated communication, scheduling, deployment, and credential tracking, the organization is empowering its own workforce to meet demand while enjoying complete control over their own schedules.

Results: Henry Ford Health conservatively estimates that Best Choice, powered by Hallmark, equipped them to avoid \$40 million in premium labor costs between 2018 and 2022, with their total annual cost avoidance rising year over year. In that same time frame, they increased patient care capacity by nearly 52% as they expanded the program into numerous additional modalities. Annual hours of deployed Best Choice resources grew from 293,000 hours in 2018 to 445,000 hours in 2022, with an additional 5% increase expected in 2023. Today, the program includes 600 staff members ranging from nurses, medical assistants, and ER techs to allied health and others.

The Power of Tech-Enablement: A Modernized Approach to Today's Mobile Workforce

True to the legacy of its trailblazing namesake, Henry Ford Health has been a leader in modernized workforce management since 2013. The story of their Best Choice Float Pool shines a spotlight on the value of tech-enablement for better staffing results at lower costs. It demonstrates how health systems can use technology to evolve – in operationally and economically advantageous ways – to meet the demands of not just patients, but also the workforce.

With a primary goal of cost containment in contingent staffing (and secondary goals of relieving nursing pressures and strengthening quality controls), Henry Ford Health created the Best Choice program to insource talent sourcing and deployment. After strategically expanding the program's breadth and depth over time (see Figure 1), they are now home to one of the largest and most effective internal agency models in the country. At the core of their success is a nimble, scalable talent sourcing and deployment model supported by Hallmark's smart technology designed for administrators and float pool staff alike.

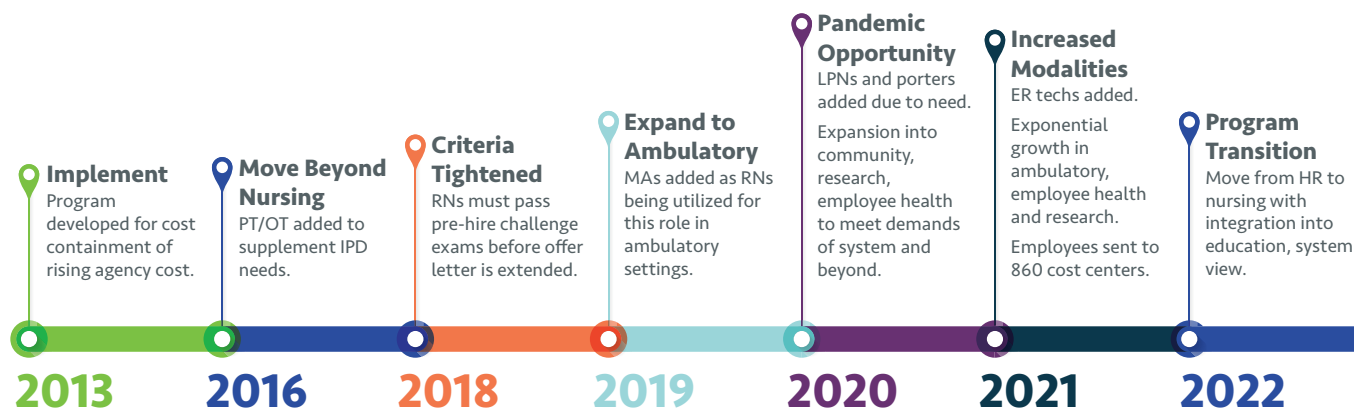


Figure 1: Key modernization milestones in the Best Choice Float Pool program.

“As we’ve progressed along this journey, Hallmark’s Internal Resource Pool was really the driving force that allowed us to achieve each milestone and keep going,” says Kim Sauro, Director of Best Choice at Henry Ford Health. “Technology is so vital in the deployment process – it really is the program enabler.”

For Sauro and team, Hallmark’s contingent labor platform eliminates much of what was previously manual, inefficient, and costly about contingent staffing. That includes credential tracking, productivity reporting, and real-time communication customized for each individual float pool member.



Smart automation has been key to the program’s growth in both size and scope. What began as a nurse-only float pool has evolved to include physical and occupational therapists, medical assistants, LPNs, porters, and ER and surgery technicians. Today, the float pool consists of 600 people, and collectively, they cover shifts across five major hospitals, 200 ambulatory sites, home health, employee health, and even the health system’s research initiatives – all at a much lower cost than the alternatives of agency staffing and overtime (see Figure 2).

Labor-Related Cost Avoidance

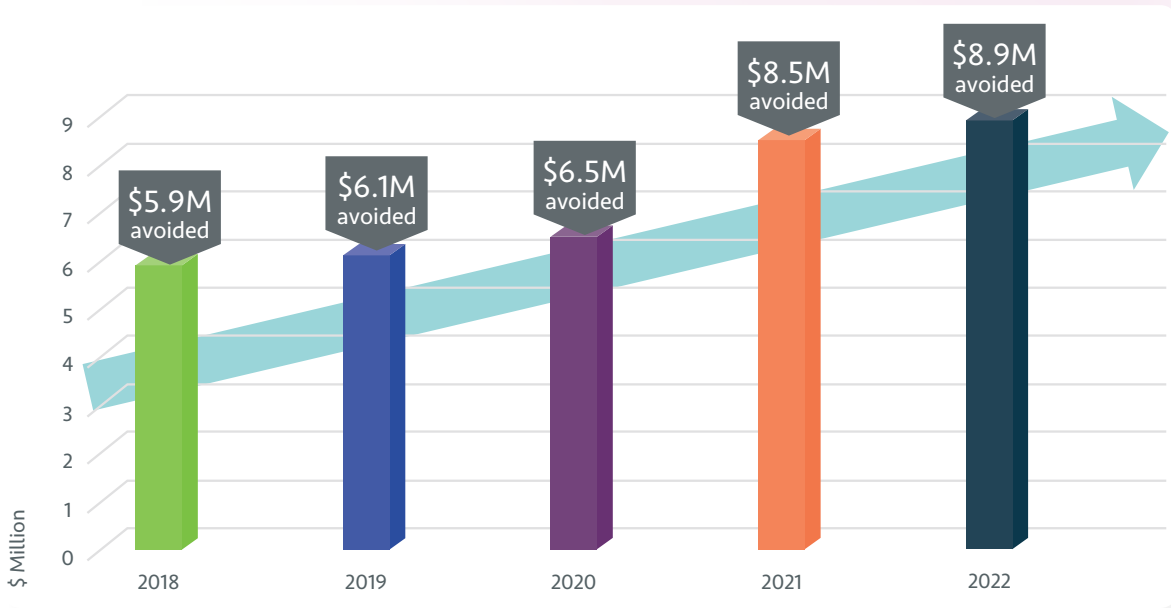


Figure 2: Conservative cost avoidance estimates based on \$20/hour cost differential between agency staff and float pool staff (during the pandemic, savings often reached \$50/hour or more).

600 float nurses & staff

and 2,500+ credentials, managed with ease.

52+% more capacity

since 2018, with steady YoY growth.

\$40 million cost avoidance

in five years, \$15M+ avoided during pandemic.

Creating a Win-Win: The Freedom of Flexible Staffing

With such a large float pool – powered by a robust workforce management system – Henry Ford Health is well-equipped to ensure the right resource, right place, right role, right time. Having more nurses working at the top of their licensure (as opposed to filling roles better suited for medical assistants and LPNs) creates a more fulfilling, satisfying work environment, and every member of the float staff is free to choose their own schedules. Only two 12-hour shifts per month are required, with no mandates for weekend or holiday shifts. And yet, many in Best Choice do opt to work outside of prime shifts.



“In reality, 45 percent of our inpatient hours are off-shift and weekends, but the caveat is that it’s not mandatory. It’s a choice, and that’s really important for many in today’s workforce,” says Sauro. In fact, Sauro says a recent employee pulse survey showed Best Choice employees gave the highest scores for belonging, meaningful work, and opportunities to learn and grow.

From millennials to near-retirees, the segment of the healthcare workforce drawn to gig-style scheduling will embrace a program like Best Choice just as much as an agency staffing model. The key is to make it easy for them to participate. “Hallmark’s Internal Resource Pool pushes out quick notifications of openings relevant to each person’s own preferences and qualifications, and the scheduling features are very intuitive,” explains Sauro. “It’s easy for everyone to create the schedule that works best for their needs at any given time.”

Another program benefit: Best Choice has also proven to be an excellent gateway for long-term recruitment. “It’s not uncommon for nurses coming in on a contingent capacity – nurses with full-time jobs elsewhere who initially see Best Choice only as a secondary gig – to ultimately decide they would enjoy full-time placement with us instead of their current employer,” Sauro says.

And, in addition to helping Henry Ford Health bring more nurses back into the fold – including those who had left or were thinking of leaving for agency staffing and/or early retirement – Best Choice has also helped the health system expand its potential pool beyond borders. The Michigan-based organization is close to Ontario, and they’ve had great success recruiting from Canada. Because Canada has universal healthcare, Sauro says many Canadian nurses are attracted to the Best Choice model of higher shift pay with fewer benefits.

As evidenced by the year-over-year growth in annual hours (and therefore, patient care capacity), the highly scalable program is a win-win for Henry Ford Health and its workforce (see Figure 3).

Increased Capacity

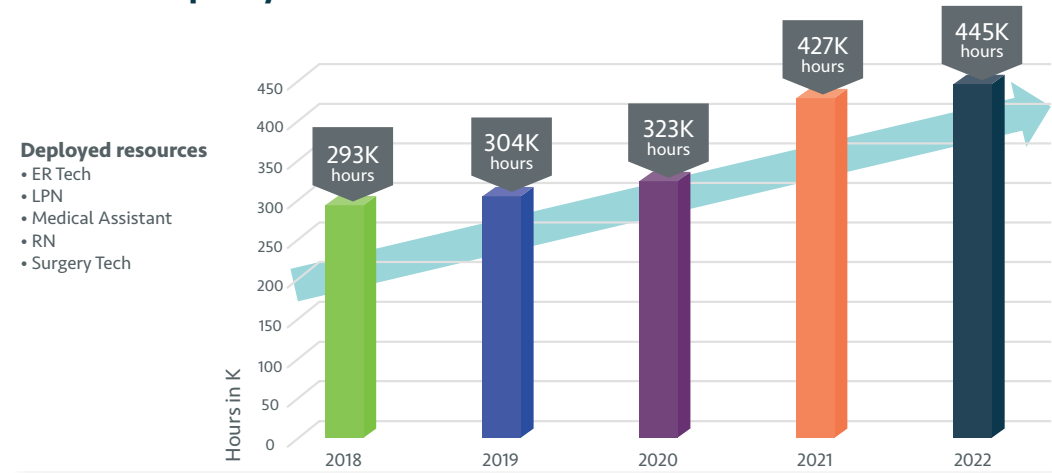


Figure 3: Year-over-year increase in hours filled by the Best Choice Float Pool, which now includes more than 100,000 hours of deployed medical assistants for more cost-effective and skill-appropriate staffing.

“Some of our greatest increases in hours happened during times of peak turnover, which is amazing. If we were less flexible on choice, I’m sure this graph would show hours going down instead of up.”

– Kim Sauro, Director, Best Choice Float Pool at Henry Ford Health

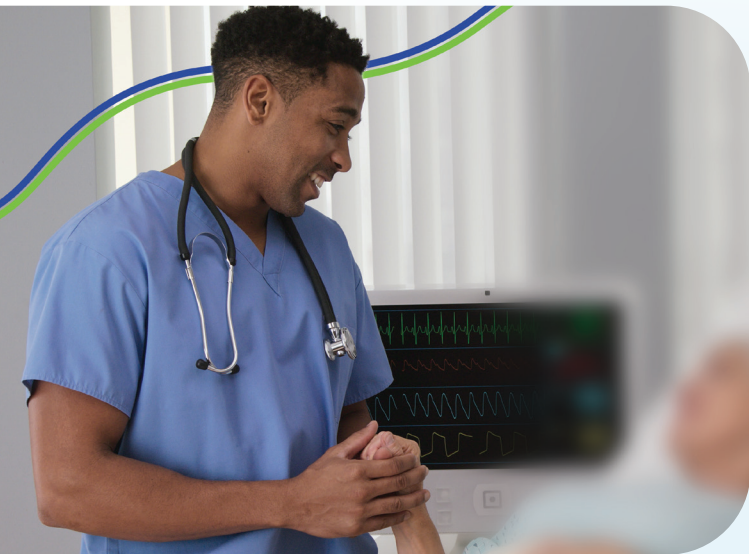


Ensuring Compliance, Protecting Quality

A float pool with 470 nurses and 600 total employees amounts to roughly 2,500 credentials that need monitoring – a herculean task if not for Hallmark’s technology. Certain areas, like the emergency department, require numerous credentials and certifications per staff member, which can become complex for even the individuals themselves to monitor, let alone the organization. Hallmark makes credential tracking and compliance easy through smart automation.

“It’s the ideal functionality because, instead of waiting until credentials are expired and risking non-compliance (or worse), the technology enables us to monitor expiration dates and give warnings to be sure the staff are aware of what’s coming due and what needs to be done to maintain their qualifications,” says Sauro. “And more importantly, from the risk management point of view, Hallmark puts automatic holds in place when credentials are no longer valid, which safeguards us from deploying somebody out into the clinical atmosphere who hasn’t met the requirements to be there.”

As an additional layer of quality protection, Best Choice’s evolution also included implementing more stringent criteria for nurse entry into the Best Choice program in 2018. Supported by the agility of the technology, this move ensured experience at the bedside while facilitating the added benefit of more streamlined orientation once deployed.



“Without Hallmark’s contingent labor platform automating communication, deployment, and credential tracking, it would be impossible to manage everything so seamlessly in a float pool this size. Making sure we only deploy an experienced, qualified workforce is essential, so for us, that assurance needed to go hand-in-hand with our cost containment goals. The technology is what makes it all possible.”

– Kim Sauro, Henry Ford Health



Scalability, Integration & Standardization

From the outset of the Best Choice endeavor, scalability was important because they knew they'd want to build the program up – and if the future turned out differently than expected, they would need to scale downward. The latter was never necessary, but scaling upward has been continuous since the program began. Its expansion has included new pathways not just for shift fulfillment and clinical quality assurance, but also for greater collaboration in workforce management.

In 2022, they integrated the program as a joint venture between Human Resources and Nursing. “That created synergy and collaboration between our departments and the clinical leaders throughout the organization,” says Sauro. “It’s been interesting to be part of the process and to simply see the standardization of policies across the system.”

Standardizing system policies is a critical success factor for redeployment between sites. Another is timely access to information about upcoming clinical research and quality initiatives for proactive labor planning. Sauro says Hallmark’s Internal Resource Pool is a great tool for this type of communication. “We can easily push out group and direct emails, and when they log into the Best Choice system, they see a message board with all important updates and information.”

Aligning with the right partner for both technology and strategy has put Henry Ford Health ahead of the curve when it comes to better staffing outcomes at lower costs. “The Best Choice program has proven that flexible employment models do work, and they are game-changing for healthcare organizations struggling to source and deploy enough talent without having to pay high agency markups,” says Jennifer Firmalan, MSN, RN, CCWP, Vice President - Workforce at Hallmark. “With the right strategy and technology, Henry Ford Health has operationalized all the key drivers of success, creating a tech-enabled mobile workforce that’s ready, willing, and able to fulfill a broad range of needs across the health system.”

“We’ve been very fortunate to be able to change and pivot based on what the workforce needs from us, even during the wildly divergent needs of the pandemic. Of course, I credit our dedicated schedulers, staffers, and educators for that – but our collective achievements wouldn’t have been possible without the technological strength Hallmark’s contingent labor platform.”

— Kim Sauro, Henry Ford Health

For more information, visit hallmarkhcs.com.





At Hallmark, we partner with healthcare organizations to overcome their labor-related challenges. From talent sourcing and deployment to provider compensation and contracting, our workforce management platform unlocks essential data, improves access to talent, drives operational efficiency, and delivers substantial cost savings. Through our unique blend of technology, strategy, service, and partnership, we empower healthcare organizations to focus on their core purpose: lifesaving patient care.