



PANDEMIC STAFFING:

How One Organization Leveraged Technology to Meet the COVID-19 Staffing Surge

A Case Study of Phoebe Putney Health System + Healthcare Workforce Logistics

ABOUT

PHOEBE PUTNEY HEALTH SYSTEM

Phoebe Putney Health System is a not-for-profit network of more than 4,500 physicians, nurses, professional staff, and volunteers. With four hospitals, a network of primary care and specialty clinics, urgent care centers, and emergency services, the Phoebe Putney Health System serves Albany, Georgia and the surrounding towns of Dougherty County in Southwest Georgia.

ABOUT

HEALTHCARE WORKFORCE LOGISTICS

Healthcare Workforce Logistics is the leader and innovator in vendor-neutral healthcare workforce solutions. With its proprietary technology and customizable managed services, HWL delivers a vendor-neutral total talent acquisition solution that lowers overall labor costs while easing administrative burden. Its success with hospitals and health systems across the country make HWL uniquely qualified to answer the State of Georgia's call for help with staffing hospitals for the COVID-19 crisis.

THE SITUATION

Cough. Fever. Shortness of breath.

The wave of patients reporting similar symptoms throughout the Phoebe Putney Health System was odd but initially not alarming--that is, until word came on March 10th that a patient who was transferred to Atlanta three days earlier had tested positive for COVID-19.

It seemed unfathomable that a virus originating across the globe could have found its way to Albany, Georgia, a city of 75,000 people located three hours south of Atlanta. But the "how" and "why" were questions to be pondered by government officials and big-city journalists. **The most pressing question at Phoebe Putney, the health system serving Albany and the surrounding towns, was, "How do we take care of all these patients?"**

In the days following the first diagnosis, all 14 medical ICU beds at Phoebe Putney Memorial Hospital were filled with COVID patients. They converted 12 cardiac ICU beds, then 12 surgical ICU beds--all filled in a matter of days. The next step in the battle was to open COVID units at Phoebe North, a hospital that had ample clinical space that was unused or being used as office space.

But making space for patients was just one concern--first and foremost was finding providers to care for them, and the usual staffing methods were not working.



We were able to relieve staffing pressures by delivering a large volume of healthcare providers within a week of distributing staffing needs to our network of qualified agencies. ”

Jonathan W. Ward
President of HWL

Phoebe Putney was able to access an innovative and cost-effective solution that HWL created for the entire state of Georgia. HWL's COVID19 Rapid Response Program provided access to a large network of more than 100 participating agencies, representing the vast majority of the available pool of Locums and temporary nurses and allied professionals nationwide.

In a March 23rd [New York Times article](#) about the outbreak in Albany, **Scott Steiner, the chief executive of Phoebe Putney Health System, emphasized the stakes: "You get to the point where you say, 'If I don't have the staff, I can't care for the patients.'"**

And the patients keep coming.

KEY CHALLENGES

- ▶ Unprecedented volume of patients = Increased demand for providers
- ▶ COVID-positive staff create unexpected staff vacancies
- ▶ Immediate timeline

GOAL

- ▶ Quickly and effectively meet the urgent staffing needs driven by increased demand and shortages of core staff due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

SCENARIO DETAILS BY THE NUMBERS:

- **Healthcare System:**
Phoebe Putney
- **Location:**
Albany, Georgia
- **MSA Size:**
151,000
- **Rate of Incidence per Capita:**
3rd in nation
- **Rate of Death per Capita:**
4th in nation
- **Capacity Expansion:**
Over 100 additional beds needed for COVID-19 patients, including the reopening of available space at Phoebe North and construction of modular units.
- **Personnel Required from HWL Network:**
 - 600+ nurse and allied staff
 - 70+ physicians

THE SOLUTION

As the situation in Albany worsened, Georgia Governor Brian Kemp announced the state's partnership with Healthcare Workforce Logistics (HWL) and its parent company, Jackson Healthcare.

The partnership was designed to deploy clinical staff during any patient surge throughout the state. At Phoebe, HWL was charged with the responsibility for sourcing all of the staff required to deliver patient care for COVID19 patients, including all nurses, respiratory therapists, pharmacists, advanced practitioners, physicians, and non-clinical personnel.

THE TRANSITION TOOK LESS THAN A WEEK. HWL STAFF:

- *Assessed staffing needs*
- *Configured the technology platform*
- *Contracted 36 staffing agency providers within 48 hours*

The number of contracted staffing agency vendors grew to more than 100 in the first few weeks. HWL leveraged a nation wide network of staffing agencies to deliver the most qualified staff quickly and efficiently.

TECHNOLOGY DRIVES THE PROCESS

"There's no doubt, having the HWL technology platform makes everything so much easier at the hospital," explains Karen Little, the HWL Account Manager for the locums program. "At any time of day, Phoebe Putney's staffing specialists can go into one central system, submit needs, review CVs, and click a button to accept a provider and begin the process of credentialing, so he or she can get to the hospital as soon as possible. The HWL VMS system is working 24 hours a day, 7 days a week to find providers."

THE RESULTS

Using the HWL technology platform and contracted suppliers, **the initial request for 230 nurses was met in twenty days.** For the reopening of Phoebe's North Campus, they needed another 129 nurses and at least 6 FTE physicians (approximately 55 locums), plus dozens of non-clinical staff.

HWL is known nationally for quickly delivering high quality healthcare professionals through the nation's largest network of staffing agencies. While a typical HWL rollout would take 6-8 weeks, the successful COVID-19 Rapid Response Surge Staffing Program deployed at Phoebe was possible because of HWL's extensive experience using next-generation technology to staff hospitals and health systems across the country and its existing relationships with over 100 staffing vendors.

“ HWL made the process easy and efficient for us. That enabled us to focus on recruiting the best talent for the client. Because of their vendor neutral approach we were able to compete on a level playing field with all of the agencies and didn't have to worry about poaching of our providers. ”

Vickie Anenberg
COO Supplemental

HWL's superior solution helped Phoebe Putney and its dedicated healthcare professionals save the lives of their COVID-19 patients by delivering 100% of the supplemental physician, nursing, and allied health professionals needed. Just as importantly, HWL's vendor neutral, open market approach created competition among agencies which generated significant savings versus initial cost estimates. Whether your healthcare organization's staffing challenges are the result of the pandemic crisis, re-opening facilities once elective surgeries return, or optimizing the utilization and cost associated with agency labor, HWL's program management services and VMS technology is designed to deliver high quality healthcare professionals at competitive market rates.

“ Phoebe was able to increase our capacity to care for COVID-19 patients substantially and quickly only because of HWL's focused and immediate attention. We were amazed at their ability – in a short timeframe – to deliver the hundreds of physicians, nurses and other healthcare professionals necessary to stand up multiple new COVID-19 units. They came through, allowing us to provide the care our community needed in a time of crisis. ”

Joe Austin
President and CEO,
Phoebe Putney
Memorial Hospital

About the COVID-19 Surge Staffing Program

The Surge Staffing Program from Jackson Healthcare and Healthcare Workforce Logistics was designed specifically for the fight against COVID-19. Through Healthcare Workforce Logistics' vendor-neutral model, healthcare delivery organizations can easily access locum tenens, nursing and allied health professionals, allowing them to rapidly address the shortage of healthcare staff and meet rising demands for professionals in the field due to the coronavirus outbreak.

The COVID-19 Surge Staffing Program is a free service to healthcare delivery organizations and is available nationwide. Just as the State of Georgia has put it into action, states across the country can benefit from the ability to staff their facilities with healthcare professionals in and around their areas. [Learn more.](#)

About Healthcare Workforce Logistics

Healthcare Workforce Logistics is the leader and innovator in vendor neutral healthcare workforce solutions to healthcare employers across the nation. With expertise and experience, HWL helps healthcare employers optimize their workforces to increase efficiency, improve patient outcomes and reduce costs. HWL delivers managed services programs, vendor management systems, candidate sourcing tools, consulting and other services. Clients include acute-care hospitals, community health centers and clinics, physician practice groups, retail and urgent care centers, home health providers and healthcare employers in many other settings.

Healthcare Workforce Logistics is part of the Jackson Healthcare family of companies. For more information, visit www.hwlmosp.com.