Optimizing Resource and Capacity Management in Community Oncology: Real-World Experience

Tennessee Oncology (TO), one of the nation's largest community oncology practices, partnered with Smirta Innovations to optimize resource utilization, scheduling efficiency, and nurse workload balance across its network.

With **79 clinical sites**, **150+ physicians**, and **250+ infusion nurses**, Tennessee Oncology (TO) needed a scalable, flexible solution to improve transparency and efficiency in daily operations.

Challenges: Operational Variability, Midday Peaks, and Limited Visibility

Prior to adopting Smirta, Tennessee Oncology's clinics operated with a high degree of local autonomy. While this supported local flexibility, it limited system-wide visibility into chair utilization, nurse staffing needs, and workload distribution. In many clinics, nurse assignments were managed in real time as patients arrived, rather than through advance planning.

This operating model resulted in

✓ **Concentrated midday demand,** with patient volumes peaking between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m., driven largely by patient preferences.

✓ **Variation in scheduling workflows** across clinics.

✓ **Imbalanced nursing workloads,** with higher strain during peak hours and underutilization at other times.

✓ **Limited ability to forecast staffing needs** or model capacity and resource constraints.

> "We learned that scheduling challenges are multi-layered. Smirta enabled us to optimize scheduling processes and patient experience by accounting for lab, infusion, nursing, and physician factors."
>
> **Susan Frailley**
> *Chief Operations Officer*
> *Tennessee Oncology*

These insights highlighted the need for a more standardized, data-driven approach to scheduling and staffing across the network.

Implementation Insights

TO implementation success was rooted in strong leadership, transparent communication, and a phased rollout strategy that started with their largest and most challenging sites. Key insights gained during the process include:

- **Change Management Requires Openness:** Transparent communication and expectation setting helped clinics understand the value of the new approach.
- **Physician Champions Matter:** Having a respected clinical voice advocating for the rollout accelerated adoption.
- **Train Leaders First:** Building data literacy and leadership buy-in ensured consistent monitoring and accountability.
- **Leverage Technology:**
  - Developed custom EHR data feeds (from OncoEMR) for near real-time updates.
  - Transitioned all clinics onto standardized scheduling and nurse assignment workflows.

Since going live with the AI-powered OncoSmart platform from Smirta Innovations, TO has realized clear and measurable benefits. Success required continuous refinement of patient workflows as well as end-user training that leveraged newly available data and reports.

Operational and Patient Experience Improvements

Patients now experience shorter wait times and more predictable care as schedulers now offer optimized appointment options rather than defaulting to patient-selected times. While some patients initially resisted the change, many ultimately appreciated the smoother flow and reduced waiting. This approach better aligns demand with capacity and required focused scheduler retraining.

- **Flattened the daily "bell curve"**, reducing midday congestion.
- **Schedulers are now guided by optimized time suggestions,** reducing variability.
- **Extended clinic coverage where necessary**, improving throughput.
- **Leadership visibility into data** now allows proactive issue resolution.

TO can now objectively validate staffing requests, identify workflow bottlenecks, and make informed decisions on chair capacity and clinic hours, all while being better positioned to accommodate walk-ins. In one example, early-morning lab delays were quickly identified and solved by adjusting lab staff shift patterns.

Nursing Benefits

Nursing operations realized a more predictable, equitable, and transparent daily workflow.

✓ **Fairer workload distribution** has improved staff satisfaction.

✓ **All clinics now use structured nurse assignments** —a significant improvement from ad hoc approaches.

✓ **Real-time acuity and skill-mix data** support evidence-based staffing models.

> " *Smirta makes it easy to access real-time data that provides evidence to support decisions that improve transparency and collaboration. Nurses are also happier now that we can plan and manage FTE requests, extended hours and even optimize shifts on the fly.* "
>
> **Kathleen L. Murphy**
> *Executive Director, Nursing Services*
> *Tennessee Oncology*

Data-Driven Decision Making

With standardized data across 79 sites of varying sizes, leadership can now easily identify under-resourced clinics, adjust staffing models, and plan strategically. The following metrics represent just some of the data that TO leadership now continuously monitors:

- Chair utilization and patient capacity targets (e.g., 75% load to maintain flexibility)
- Nurse-to-patient ratios
- Scheduler compliance with AI recommendations
- Acuity balancing across clinics

TO developed standardized, data-backed processes flexible enough to accommodate clinic differences, as well as tools to validate staffing requests, ensure balanced nurse-to-patient ratios, and improve scheduling efficiency across all sites.

The Future of Cancer Center Operations

TO leadership believes that **transparency, overcommunication, and continuous collaboration**, both across their organization and with Smirta Innovations staff, were essential success factors. By transforming anecdotal pain points into data-driven insights, TO operates more efficiently, with better nurse workload balance and higher patient satisfaction.

Tennessee Oncology and Smirta continue collaborating on automated scheduling workflows, enhanced acuity algorithms and predictive staffing dashboards powered by AI.

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