



Sentara Health is a prominent health system in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic and Southeast regions. It ranks among the country's top 20 largest not-for-profit integrated health systems. With a workforce of 30,000 dedicated employees, Sentara encompasses 12 hospitals in Virginia and northeastern North Carolina. In addition, the Sentara Health Plans division effectively manages the health care needs of over 1.2 million members in Virginia and Florida. Nationally recognized for its commitment to clinical quality and safety, Sentara remains steadfastly focused on innovation and delivering an exceptional health care experience to its patients and members. The Sentara Medical Group (SMG), comprising more than 1,500 physicians, advanced practice providers (APPs), and multi-disciplinary teams, completes over 2.8 million patient visits annually. The organization has a strong commitment to innovation and continues to implement new technologies for improved outcomes, safety, and efficiency.

THE CHALLENGE

Though a forward-thinking organization in the health care industry, Sentara faced significant challenges in clinical workforce staffing, recruiting, and planning across urban and rural settings. As a growing health system with the need for an efficient, flexible solution, Sentara sought a partner to provide an enhanced methodology to further develop and complete their provider recruitment strategy and provider needs assessment.

While delivering quality care to a large and diverse population is one of Sentara's key missions, tracking a fluctuating number of care providers had become challenging. Maintaining a roster of the organization's physicians required frequent and manual updates. Amid an ongoing health care workforce crisis, Sentara recognized the need for an innovative workforce strategy to balance the operational post-COVID realities, align with organizational and cultural needs, and meet their transformation goals.

A key priority for the solution was a self-service and comprehensive workforce planning platform that would provide their team easy access to real-time data.

THE APPROACH

After a comprehensive search, Sentara chose SullivanCotter's Provider Needs Assessment (PNA) tool. PNA is an interactive cloud-based application that delivers accurate and actionable data-driven insights to help organizations identify, monitor and respond to changing service needs and provider staffing requirements.

"We began the RFP process in search of a predictive model that could adjust to population-specific criteria, be calibrated based on area-specific consideration, and incorporate all of the evolving health care trends, such as APP productivity," noted Shikha Parakh, Director, Corporate Strategy and Planning at Sentara Health. "SullivanCotter's PNA tool stood out because of the opportunities to flex the model, the ability to look at 'what-if' scenarios, and also have the provision of a best-in-class solution. They were the clear winner," added Parakh.

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Sentara utilized fundamental change management principles at the beginning of the PNA implementation process, including creating awareness, establishing accountability, and reinforcing the need for constant dialogue and communication. As part of the related communications toolkit, Sentara provided over 80+ leaders access to data including regional provider needs assessments, service area reports, and specific reports by service line.

Collaborating with SullivanCotter, Sentara created an FAQ document to ensure team members weren't reviewing reports in a bubble. "We wanted to facilitate a better understanding of the key considerations and illustrate to stakeholders how to leverage the tool's data best," said Parakh. "Providing data transparency and an understanding of the methodology inspired a greater amount of trust and buy-in," Parakh noted.

SullivanCotter's PNA allowed for robust analysis and straightforward reporting – creating custom reports with only a few clicks. Sentara established a community needs assessment council, including members from the legal and strategy teams, to review and approve all provider recruitment plans.

THE RESULTS

PNA gave Sentara the ability to measure demand for specific services in their markets, helping them estimate the number of providers needed in those areas. This information proved invaluable for recruitment, enabling them to develop service line strategies, identify growth opportunities, and determine surplus/deficit areas to plan for the next budget year.

Sentara quickly benefitted from using SullivanCotter's PNA, particularly noting the ease of downloading data, the visual appeal of the maps, the ability to clearly identify surplus/deficit, and the predictive modeling capability as far as five years out. PNA also provided Sentara with a more strategic view of local market needs by factoring in provider supply in the adjacent geographic areas. Often, collaborating with adjacent market service providers allowed them to fulfill the market need without adding more FTEs. In addition, the predictive modeling allowed Sentara to analyze demographic information to help assess potential retirements and know where succession planning was needed.

Sentara quickly realized numerous benefits, including:

- Financial and operational efficiencies
- Improved decision-making and strategic recruitment
- Effective succession planning
- Increased synchronization between provider teams, strategy teams, and local market operators

"A key aspect of the tool is that the data can be modified, and we can apply qualitative insight to the mathematical model. We aren't limited to just using the tool to flesh out the information. The provider roster can be updated to keep up with what is happening in each local market, and all of the insights that come with that," stated Parakh.

PNA's ability to create robust, custom reports with only a few clicks, makes the analysis and reporting process significantly easier. The ability to measure the demand for services in their markets supports Sentara in efficiently meeting the needs of their communities, resulting in improved patient access. "Using

the tool to create strategies, specifically in our rural markets where geographic location is a barrier to care, has resulted in a new service pattern,” shared Parakh.

POST-LAUNCH CHALLENGES AND RESOLUTION

Despite the overall success of PNA’s launch, Sentara did face a few challenges. As expected, internal adoption and use of a new tool can often be difficult. Sentara realized that additional education was required for the organization to leverage its insights, understand the methodology, and ensure data transparency. To tackle these challenges, Sentara provided ongoing education workshops on compliance regulations and collaborated closely with SullivanCotter for guidance and support.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR BUSINESSES

The successful launch of SullivanCotter’s PNA tool at Sentara Health offers valuable insights for health care organizations considering a new product launch:

- 1. Employ Change Management Principles:** Engage stakeholders through awareness, accountability, and constant communication while introducing the new product.
- 2. Collaboration is Key:** Partner with the product creator to allow for greater understanding and ensure use of the product to its full potential.
- 3. Focus on Data-driven Insights:** Combine quantitative and qualitative data to drive better decision-making and strategy development.
- 4. Ongoing Education and Support:** Ensure all stakeholders can access resources and support throughout the adoption and post-launch stages.

“PNA affords us an overall holistic review, which is critical due to the unique nature of our markets. This enables us to create strategies from both an enterprise standpoint, and a local perspective. Working together through the team site ensures collaboration between the provider team, strategy team, and local market operators to meet market needs effectively and strategically,” noted Parakh.

Sentara Health’s experience highlights the importance of a flexible, data-driven, and innovative approach to successfully completing a robust provider needs assessment and clinical workforce planning process. By leveraging SullivanCotter’s PNA tool, Sentara tackled the challenges of workforce staffing, recruiting, and planning. This enabled them to efficiently adapt their health care services to meet the needs of an ever-changing landscape.

“Implementing the SullivanCotter PNA has provided Sentara with the tools and data to understand the supply and demand in our market. The outcome value isn’t just in successfully recruiting a needed provider. It’s also in knowing we are investing wisely in our provider workforce to fulfill short-and long-term needs. This is the first time we’ve had that kind of insight — it is very exciting and has convinced us that this is the future,” remarked Parakh.

SullivanCotter’s Provider Needs Assessment is an interactive cloud-based application that delivers accurate and actionable data-driven insights to help organizations identify, monitor and respond to changing service needs and provider staffing requirements.

**Contact Us to Learn More
or Request a Demo**