



# Nurse Scheduling Software Solution: Eight Tech Questions to Ask

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# NURSE SCHEDULING TECHNOLOGY: EIGHT TECH QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Is your system managed on-premises or is it cloud-based?
2. Does your software interface with other third-party systems?
3. How often is data communicated between integrated systems?
4. What is the smallest interval your software can recover?
5. Does your software support auto-import of users?
6. How many shift types can your solution accommodate?
7. Is your system accessible on mobile devices?
8. Can you handle large accounts without sacrificing performance?

Nursing school did not train you to be a software engineer, but there may be times in your career as a nurse manager that you feel like one. As you MacGyver your way through the day struggling with the duty roster for nurses, creating stop-gap solutions like maintaining a spreadsheet of who's owed shift incentives because none of your current nurse rostering solutions will do it automatically, or scribbling a post-it note to remind a nurse she needs to sign out from yesterday's shift because the software won't do that, either.

And maybe sometimes you think to yourself, "If only I had known the right questions to ask the vendor before we bought this healthcare workforce management software. But I'm not a tech person, and I just didn't know what to ask."

We understand that pain because we hear it from prospective clients every day. And we're here to help.

**This easy-to-read buyer's guide offers you eight key tech questions to ask vendors before purchasing a nurse scheduling software solution. The guide won't turn you into a software engineer – but it might make you sound like the smartest tech person in the room during vendor interviews.**





# **NURSE SCHEDULING TECHNOLOGY**

**EIGHT TECH QUESTIONS TO ASK**



# 1. IS YOUR SYSTEM MANAGED ON-PREMISES OR IS IT CLOUD-BASED?

## What This Means

Locally-managed on-premises software systems (including the application software and the data records) reside on a hospital's own servers, not unlike when you insert a USB into your laptop to install the program directly onto your computer's hard drive. Cloud-based systems live on the vendor's servers.

## Why This Matters

It might feel like installing your scheduling software right on the hospital's own servers somehow makes the most sense or provides the best value, but that's not the case. In fact, quite the opposite is true.

Cloud-based software provides a multitude of advantages over locally installed solutions:

### **Data security**

The in-house IT team must juggle a large number of priorities every day – of which security is just one – while a cloud-based vendor focuses heavily on securing your data because its business reputation depends on it.

### **Data preservation**

Data usually gets backed up much more frequently in the cloud than it does on a local server. Your hospital's IT department may only back up its servers once a day, while a good cloud-based application will be backed up as regularly as you require such as every 15 minutes or even less.





## Why This Matters

### **Cost savings**

When enterprise workforce management software resides locally, the IT department must invest time, personnel and financial resources into maintaining the program and troubleshooting any issues that arise. But, again, maintaining specialty software represents one of many competing IT priorities in any organisation. It's much more cost-effective to let the vendor manage the software, because its only focus is its own software. If an issue arises, you'll receive a lightning-fast response from the vendor, saving your staff time and soft costs associated with downtime.

### **Mobility**

Cloud-based software solutions allow employees to easily access the program from any location. That's particularly important for hospital shift management software, so that nurses and other staff members can connect to the application using their smartphone or tablet from home, on holiday... or even while grocery shopping.

### **Bottom Line**

For the best value, efficiency, security and flexibility, purchase ward scheduling software that's cloud-based.



## 2. DOES YOUR SOFTWARE INTERFACE WITH OUR OTHER THIRD-PARTY SYSTEMS?

### What This Means

Not all healthcare workforce management software solution can receive and exchange information with other software solutions you already use. And some solutions cannot be configured to work with that other software, either.

### Why This Matters

The usefulness of nurse rostering software becomes limited if it can't exchange information with other software, like time-and-attendance or the demographic system of record.

Here's an example: If your scheduling software can't interface with your HR information systems and a nurse leaves your employment for another hospital, you will have to manually 'terminate' that employee and revoke their credentials to access the scheduling system. That's a lot of extra work, compared to software that can talk to the HRIS system, match the employment status code and automatically terminate the nurse in the scheduling software and revoke their access.

Another example: A good workforce optimisation solution will interface with your payroll vendor's system to automatically pass shift incentives and pay codes over. This relieves you of the responsibility and hassle of manually tracking that information yourself and ensuring your nurses get paid fairly.

### Bottom Line

Make sure your scheduling software vendor can demonstrate prior to purchase that their system can interface with all your other existing software solutions.





## 3. HOW OFTEN IS DATA COMMUNICATED BETWEEN INTEGRATED SYSTEMS?

### What This Means

Can your scheduling software communicate 'at will' with other software programs your hospital uses, or does this data exchange happen on an arbitrary schedule?

### Why This Matters

Some vendors restrict your scheduling software's ability to communicate with other systems you already use, such as time-and-attendance. Those vendors may dictate pre-set intervals for data exchanges, with no flexibility for configuration. If your scheduling software is only allowed to communicate with other systems every hour... or two hours, or four hours... it can create administrative nightmares for you. For instance, if two nurses swap shifts at the last minute, you need your scheduling software to update that information immediately, so you know who's working when.

The best scheduling software programs allow you to customise how frequently these data exchanges occur so that the application is tailored to your unique needs. You can configure some situations to update immediately, like shift swaps, while scheduling other tasks (like interfacing with HRIS to automatically add new employees) to occur every few hours.

### Bottom Line

First, make sure your vendor's software can communicate with all the other systems you already use. Second, find out if the software can be configured to exchange data at the intervals that best meet your needs.



## 4. WHAT IS THE SMALLEST INTERVAL YOUR SOFTWARE CAN RECOVER?

### What This Means

All software 'saves' or 'backs up' periodically. But how often does the vendor's scheduling software do that?

### Why This Matters

If some sort of catastrophe occurred and your scheduling software had to be restored from a backup, how much data could you live without? If you lost 12 hours' worth of nurse schedules, would that pose a problem? What about all the lost history, such as who called in sick, who swapped shifts and who worked overtime during the period in which data can't be recovered? Who will reconstruct all that lost data?

This question represents one of those aspects of technology that you might not even think to bring up with a vendor, but it's an important one. Fortunately, software crashes aren't common. But if one occurs, you don't want your professional life thrown into chaos because you lack half a day's data or more.

### Bottom Line

Before you choose a scheduling software solution, make sure it can recover as much of your data as possible in the unlikely event of a crash. Aim for a solution that backs up its data at least every 15 minutes.





## 5. DOES YOUR SOFTWARE SUPPORT AUTO-IMPORT OF USERS?

### What This Means

Can the software automatically import your staff profiles to the scheduling software without having to manually enter each one?

### Why This Matters

The first step in installing any nurse scheduling software is to create an account for each person. Some solutions do not support the automatic import of employee names, credentials and other relevant information. If that's the case, it means someone has to manually register every employee in your department, which can be quite labour-intensive if your organisation employs thousands of nurses.

But there's another reason to ask this question. Beyond the initial set-up, a software solution that can't automatically import users won't be able to perform that task going forward, either, which means every time you hire a new employee you'll have to manually register them. Oh, and you'll have to manually terminate access to the scheduling system whenever an employee leaves your organisation, too.

### Bottom Line

For maximum convenience, make sure your scheduling software can automatically import new users – not only in the beginning, but on an ongoing basis. Ideally, purchase a software solution that allows you to define when new user information gets pulled in: daily, in real-time, or at whatever interval that works best for your needs.



## 6. HOW MANY SHIFT TYPES CAN YOUR SOLUTION ACCOMMODATE?

### What This Means

Does the vendor's solution offer a defined catalog of shift types, or are they configurable?

### Why This Matters

There's a reason you do scheduling the way you do. Why should you have to change how you schedule in order to accommodate a software solution? Shouldn't it be the other way around?

As a nurse manager, you know that different departments have different staffing needs. A standard 7am-7pm shift on a Med-Surg floor doesn't necessarily work in the ER or on a Neo Natal unit, for example. Yet some software vendors require their clients to choose from a limited list of shift types, whether those particular choices work for you or not doesn't matter to them.

And what about a nurse who called in at the last minute, and who works just a five-hour shift? Some vendors can't accommodate an unconventional shift like that, which means you can't record the shift in your scheduling software to preserve it in your staffing history.

### Bottom Line

Look for a scheduling software solution with no pre-configured shift types. This provides you with maximum flexibility to define shifts in the way that works best for your department.





## 7. IS YOUR SYSTEM ACCESSIBLE ON MOBILE DEVICES?

### What This Means

Can your nurses and other employees easily access the scheduling software on their smartphones and tablet computers?

### Why This Matters

Most people today own a smartphone – and, believe it or not, they use them for more than posting selfies on Instagram. Millennial nurses, in particular, use technology at a high level and expect to be able to navigate their professional lives with their phones and tablets. In fact, savvy hospitals tout their modern technology solutions to recruit and retain millennial nurses.

Of course, nurses of all generations appreciate the ability to sign up for shifts, swap shifts, review their hours and more – all from their phone or tablet, no matter where they happen to be at the time. And the best scheduling software will offer your staff both iOS and Android apps to make the process even easier.

Some vendors may say their system is accessible on mobile devices, but what they mean is you have to laboriously type a lengthy URL into your mobile browser to access the software's full site, which may be slow to load and might not render well on a phone or tablet.

### Bottom Line

Make sure your scheduling software can be accessed using any mobile device, preferably through an app. During vendor interviews, ask them to demonstrate how the solution works on a mobile app.



## 8. CAN YOU HANDLE LARGE ACCOUNTS WITHOUT SACRIFICING PERFORMANCE?

### What This Means

Can the software handle large accounts without sacrificing performance?

### Why This Matters

Is there anything more frustrating than a software program that takes forever to load or hangs for 30 seconds after every click? Nobody should be subjected to that level of poor performance, but unfortunately it sometimes happens when vendors take on a large account, either because their software design is flawed or because they failed to invest in adequate hardware to handle the increased computing power required.

Database structure becomes crucial when scaling a software application to handle hundreds or thousands of users. Poorly designed databases can cause performance to come to a crashing halt, while the best-designed databases perform with ease no matter how many transactions per second they field. Beyond the software's architecture, hardware issues also can slow down performance. No software can perform efficiently if not backed by adequate numbers of servers with speedy CPUs.

You don't have to become an expert in software scalability to assess how well a prospective vendor's solution can handle a large workload. Just ask for examples of large installations in which their software maintained its performance. Also, ask for references from clients who have been using the software for some time – and then be sure to actually call them. Sometimes a client offers a vendor a positive reference early in the software's life cycle, but their satisfaction diminishes as its performance declines when the organisation grows. You won't know unless you actually speak to the reference.

### Bottom Line

Don't invest in any scheduling software that doesn't demonstrate an ability to scale up, along with your organisation.



# TALK TO US

Now that you know the questions to ask, book a demo today to discover how scheduling software, developed by nurses for nurses, can make your professional life easier – no MacGyvering required.

[www.healthstreamanz.com/contact](http://www.healthstreamanz.com/contact)

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Our capacity management solutions include staff scheduling, time & attendance, hospital flow and patient demand. We help healthcare organisations increase retention, reduce risk, improve visibility of the hospital and regional efficiency, and be more compliant.

We have a long history of working with nurses. Our nurse scheduling solution, ShiftWizard, is an easy-to-use software that's been developed by nurses, for nurses. With a single, integrated solution, your nurse leaders will be able to reduce staffing costs, improve retention, save time spent scheduling, empower staff, improve patient outcomes, and eliminate internal misunderstandings.

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Helping hospitals and healthcare institutions globally, our team of experts understand professional medical pain points and have the knowledge and technical solutions to solve them. If you're looking to advance your institution's medical processes and ensure patients receives consistent, quality care, [please reach out to the HealthStream team](#). With a wealth of medical software solution experience, we are confident we can help.