

Case Study - SpectraSoft AppointmentsPRO

Student Counseling & Resource Service University of Chicago Chicago, IL

“I reviewed many different scheduling software packages in order to find a program that would meet our specific scheduling needs, as well as a program that would be easy for our clinicians to use and understand. SpectraSoft is very easy to use and exactly what we needed.”

- Deb Pratt, Associate Director for Administration

Company Description

The Student Counseling and Resource Service (SCRS) at the University of Chicago makes available mental health programs and services for its university student body of 11,000. SCRS responds to a wide range of psychological concerns presented by its student body.

In addition to diagnostic assessments, individual and couples treatment, SCRS offers a number of therapy groups. Therapy Groups have dealt with such topics as Eating Concerns, Procrastination, Relationships, and Dissertation Support. All SCRS treatment modalities are designed to help students deal with the mental health issues they face during their university career.

The SCRS has a highly qualified staff of 21 social workers, psychologists, and psychiatrists. This is the 46th year of service for this award winning university mental health clinic.

Situation

According to Deb Pratt, Associate Director for Administration, the Student Counseling and Resource Service has been a busy place during her entire tenure of 15 years with the University of Chicago. But it was not always the smooth running operation that it is now.

“Our front office was using a 3-ring binder to keep track of appointments when I arrived at the SCRS,” she said. “It really was a nightmare. Each therapist was responsible for entering and updating his/her own schedule into the notebook. If there were changes, someone would erase an appointment in one place and re-enter it in a different place.

“Every schedule and all the appointments were kept in the book, so you can imagine our panic when an appointment disappeared or became covered up or illegible.

“Handwriting was sometimes difficult to read, and if there were questions, a therapist would invariably have to come down to the front desk to try to decipher the writing. Sometimes a therapist would enter an appointment for another clinician, and if we didn’t recognize the handwriting we’d have no clue who had entered it, or the reasons behind the appointment.

“Patients had to interact with the front desk three times around one appointment – first when they called to schedule, second when they arrived, and third to re-schedule when they were finished with the appointment. Between the patients checking in and checking out, and the therapists checking up on what was happening, congregating around the front desk was a complete nightmare.

“There were serious issues with information access and control, and pressure on the front office staff to make scheduling decisions they were not trained to make,” said Deb. “Sometimes scheduling decisions, like ‘when to make an appointment and with whom,’ have clinical implications that are inappropriate for a person without clinical training,” she explained. “But at that time, such circumstances were frequently unavoidable.

“While the office staff felt the pressure, our therapists complained they did not have enough control. Morale suffered.”

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Solution

Deb began searching for an answer soon after she started her job. She looked at many programs but did not want to make a decision that wouldn't work for her environment.

"In addition to the many issues specific to a large and vibrant university mental health clinic, I was also dealing with a number of computer-phobic staff who had great concerns about learning new technology, so I had to be careful about making a good choice," she explained.

"I spent a number of years researching and testing different scheduling programs, before I finally decided upon SpectraSoft. SpectraSoft offered the solution I believed would best accommodate our specific needs, and it appeared to have a reasonable learning curve for our staff."

SCRS installed SpectraSoft's *Appointments Professional*[™] in 2000 and upgraded to *AppointmentsPRO*[™] 7.0 in 2001.

Results

Under Deb Pratt's guidance, the University of Chicago Student Counseling and Resource Service took a problem-solving approach to the implementation of their new scheduling program. As a result they discovered unique ways to use the features and flexibility of the software. Their creativity has enabled them to deliver their outstanding mental health programs and services in a smoother, more efficient manner.

"One feature that's nice for us is that everyone uses the system themselves," said Deb. "If a psychologist wants to refer a student (patient) to one of our psychiatrists, he or she can look up the schedule on his or her desktop computer, find an opening and schedule the appointment while the patient is seated in the office. By the time the patient leaves the session, he/she knows about the next appointment and is able to leave the building without stopping at the front desk."

Self-scheduling by SCRS therapists has cut the number of patients who congregate at the front desk by 50 percent, claims Deb. Now the front office staff has time to focus on serving the needs of incoming patients and address other critical administrative concerns. "It has proven to be a much more effective and efficient system."

"Each therapist also has better control over the care of his or her own patients," she said. "Allowing our intake counselors to schedule patients to another resource themselves enables them to enter notes for that appointment as well. All they have to do is double-click the appointment slot to open the notes field. Even after the note is closed, its presence remains clearly indicated by a dog-ear in the window."

"This eliminates all the missed information and mis-information that was prevalent under the old system," she said. "Now, when one of our psychiatrists wonders 'Why am I seeing this patient?' he or she can easily refer back to the appointment source for more information. The software tells you who scheduled the appointment if the notes are not there."

"We also color code appointments. This makes them very easy to find and alerts the front office to give these new patients an application form to fill out when they come in. The intake counselors use a similar convention when referring a patient for their first follow-up appointment. This helps therapists recognize new patients and plan for their day a little better," she said.

"I also love the information that *AppointmentsPRO* provides on the main screen. All we have to do to find a name, phone number, e-mail address and case code is to hover (mouse) over the screen, and it pops right up."

"It's all about flexibility and control," said Deb. "We probably don't use all the powers and features of the software, but the ones we use have enhanced our efficiency and morale and made a big difference in the way we are able to do our jobs. It took a long time to find an appropriate scheduling software choice, but SpectraSoft is very easy to use and exactly what we needed. I believe it was ultimately worth the effort and wait."

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About SpectraSoft

SpectraSoft Inc. is a leading developer of Windows-based appointment scheduling and resource management software. SpectraSoft's signature products, *Appointware*[™], *AppointmentsPRO*[™], and *AppointmentsES*[™] are installed in more than 3000 facilities nationwide. SpectraSoft's products have been developed specifically for healthcare and other service oriented industries. For more information and a free demo please contact a sales representative at 1-800-889-0450 or visit our website at www.ssoft.com.