

Michael Mittleman, associate commissioner and chief information officer, NYS Office of Mental Health

The NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH) has been around for more than 140 years, and is currently in charge of 28 hospital facilities with 6,500 inpatients and 25,000 outpatients. There are 16,000 professional and clinical staffers to care for these patients. In recent years, OMH has paid out as much as \$25 to 30 million in overtime costs. "We think this is something controllable," Michael said.

"Senior management in the OMH central office and its facilities recognized the need for a new management tool to monitor, control, and assess the nature and quantity of overtime consumption," he said. "In addition to controlling costs, the benefits of such a tool could be expanded to identify understaffed job titles, aid in redistributing pass days between staff, and evaluate overtime episodes requiring closer examination and possible management intervention."

When designing the new information system to monitor and analyze overtime costs, Michael said OMH staffers knew what they wanted. "We opted for a Web-based system. The Windows motif, GUI (graphical user interface), was very attractive to us. There needed to be a certain cachet about it that these are cutting edge tools," he said. One of the major requirements was that the tool had to involve only a small amount of training for end users. The system also had to present a wealth of overtime data -- including dates, quantity, and costs -- at both the state and facility levels. Charts to graphically depict the results of ad hoc queries and reports based on those queries were also a necessity. The overtime analysis tool had to be very versatile and current. Users can view overtime by job title, facility, dates, days of the week, and salary level, and the information is updated every pay period. Michael said the resulting overtime analysis Intranet tool has all of these components.

In addition to system components, designers had to also consider the users' requirements. "How has this changed the skill sets for state workers?" Michael said. When using this type of system, users require the following information competencies:

- Overcome technological phobias
- Exploit the available information resources
- Know how to interpret tables and graphs
- Understand the statistics
- Draw conclusions from multiple views of the same data
- View the PC as a personal tool to make new information

"One of the challenges that falls back onto the IT department is to come up with a display system that converts data into information and have the viewer smart enough to translate it and apply it in a business plan," he said. "There's a great deal of data available. It's part of our mission to make people data aware, helping them see how they can translate available data into information they can use to run the program."

Overall, ensuring that users have the skills to use the data in your new information system is just as important as the system design. The system will only be effective if users understand how to access, interpret, and apply the data. "Digesting the data is not the same things as knowing the data," Michael said.