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Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/4374>

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Chestnut Hill, MA: [Sloan Work and Family Research Network], 2005

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Workplace Flexibility Case Study
ARUP Laboratories and the Seven-On/Seven-Off Schedule
by Ken Giglio

Company: ARUP Laboratories (www.aruplab.com)

Company profile: As a national reference laboratory, ARUP Laboratories' primary function is to perform testing on blood and tissues, which helps physicians and surgeons correctly diagnose their patients' diseases. ARUP specializes in performing more than 2,000 complex or unique tests, ranging from tests for cancer and leukemia to those which identify rare genetic disorders. These tests are available at only a limited number of laboratories in the United States. In addition, ARUP conducts blood-related research and has a blood services unit that is responsible for supplying nearby hospitals with approximately 25 percent of all blood transfused in the state of Utah. An enterprise of the University of Utah, ARUP's clients include more than half of the nation's university teaching hospitals and children's hospitals, major commercial labs, military and government facilities, and major clinics.

Program profile: ARUP offers several options for flexible work schedules, including a "Seven-On/Seven-Off" schedule for workers in its technical and support sections. Under this arrangement, employees work seven 10-hour days in a row, and then have seven straight days off. Though employees work a total of 70 hours under this plan, they are paid for 80 hours. Because the employees are off work 26 weeks of the year, they are not offered any extra paid time off. The company acknowledges that this type of schedule is not for everyone. However, the success of the program speaks for itself: ARUP has had a "Seven-On/Seven-Off" option for employees since 1991, and it remains very popular among workers.

The Challenge: ARUP is a deadline-driven facility that requires rapid turnaround times for the testing it performs. As a result, it is a 24-hour a day, seven-day a week workplace. It is an ongoing challenge for the company to staff afternoon and night shifts as well as weekends and holidays, but the company feels that "Seven-On/Seven-Off" certainly contributes to the solution.

Benefits to employees: ARUP employees have the ability on this schedule to have seven straight days off, allowing them to spend more focused time with their families. Many workers also find it allows them to pursue further education, many in graduate programs including those offered at the University of Utah. There are also some working couples in which one partner works the Seven-On, while the other is on their Seven-Off. That way, they have two full-time jobs but there is always one parent home to take care of children and other family needs.

Benefits to employer: This schedule, along with other non-traditional schedules employed by ARUP, allows the company to continuously remain open for business. This provides ARUP with a competitive advantage, in that it is able to quickly turn around its

testing results, meeting clients' needs. It has realized a reduction in employee turnover rates in recent years, which it credits to its flexible scheduling options.

Lessons Learned: ARUP's family-friendly philosophy allows employees to balance family, work and school by choosing from a wide variety of flexible job schedules including traditional hours, days, nights, weekend shifts, four- or three-day work weeks, or – as detailed in this case study -- seven days on, seven days off.

Personal profile: Zakaria and Zahia Ibrahim are among the employees at ARUP who take advantage of the Seven-On/Seven-Off schedule. The Ibrahims immigrated to Utah from Egypt in 1997. Zakaria went to work in 1998 as a lab assistant in ARUP's Special Chemistry Laboratory and Zahia began work at ARUP as a laboratory sample sorter shortly thereafter. She now works as a technician in ARUP's Cytogenetic Laboratory. The Ibrahims work opposite Seven-On/Seven-Off schedules so that one can be at ARUP working and the other can be at home with their children. "Although we don't see each other as much as we'd like, this arrangement helps us to balance out work and family in a unique way".