



## Virtual Nursing: Models of Care

As discussed by Sylvain Trepanier, R.N., chief nursing officer at Providence, “Virtual nursing was introduced a couple of decades ago, but it’s getting a fresh look thanks in large part to its successful use during the height of the pandemic. Today, leaders at many health systems are piloting technologies and expanding programs as they work to systematically scale this model.”<sup>1</sup>

Nursing leaders have identified five essential characteristics for successful virtual nursing programs:

1. Be inclusive from the start.
2. Allow time for relationship building.
3. Anticipate technological difficulties.
4. Don’t be afraid to change workflows.
5. Make sure buildings have adequate wireless bandwidth.

The AHA has collected from our member hospitals and health systems examples of successful virtual nursing programs. Below is a brief summary of those case examples.

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### BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE WITH HOUSTON METHODIST

Houston Methodist embarked on an ambitious journey to maximize the use of technology to reimagine its workforce model. That includes a virtual ICU, telenurses doing patient intake and discharge, and artificial intelligence helping identify staff training needs. This approach results in clinicians being able to spend more time at the bedside.

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### IMPLEMENTING A VIRTUAL TEAM MODEL IN THE ACUTE CARE SETTING

Nursing leaders offer insights into the journey of deconstructing the nurses’ role and planning for a Co-Caring Model to effectively work as a team to care for those in need. The bedside nursing team, telehealth nursing leadership, and other ancillary services (clinical education, quality, informatics, pharmacy and case management) teams walked through a clinical discovery process, looking at all aspects of bedside care, and identified what could be completed virtually versus what required hands-on bedside care. Qualitative results suggest that this care model is slowly bringing back the joy in the practice of the health care team. Adventist Health-COPE Health Scholars Medical Assistant Program

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### COVENANT MEDICAL CENTER REVOLUTIONIZES THE WAY NURSES DELIVER CARE

To help combat the U.S. health care workforce shortage, Covenant Medical Center piloted Co-Caring, an innovative hybrid nursing model that provides patients with high-quality care and increases caregiver satisfaction, success and retention. After a successful pilot year at Covenant Medical Center, part of the Providence family of organizations, the health system now expands its program to 10 other units in its hospitals across Providence’s seven-state service area.

#### Footnote

1. [5 Imperatives to Scale a Virtual Nursing Program](#)

## **BON SECOURS MERCY HEALTH PILOTS VIRTUAL NURSING**

Cincinnati-based Bon Secours Mercy Health is piloting virtual nursing at three hospitals as it studies how it might expand the technology to all of its 48 hospitals. The pilots are at Mercy Health — St. Rita's Medical Center in Lima, Ohio, Bon Secours — Southside Medical Center in Petersburg, Va., and Mercy Health — Fairfield (Ohio) Hospital. Nurses beam in through televisions and see patients via in-room cameras, helping with admissions, discharges, patient education and medication verification.

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## **SAINT JOSEPH HOSPITAL INTRODUCES VIRTUALLY INTEGRATED CARE THROUGH USE OF PIONEERING TECHNOLOGY**

CHI Saint Joseph Health is one of the first hospitals to implement a virtual nursing model using technology developed by CommonSpirit Health. The new model adds a virtual registered nurse (RN) to the hospital care team, which includes a bedside nurse and a patient care assistant. The new technology makes the virtual nurse readily available to patients and families through the tap of a screen and allows the bedside team to focus on other responsibilities. The model adds a virtual RN to in-home care teams to assist in improving care quality and lessening staff difficulties.

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## **CREATING PARTNERSHIPS FOR CARE: OCHSNER'S VIRTUAL NURSE PROGRAM**

Ochsner Medical Center in Kenner, La., began an integrated and innovative virtual nurse pilot in 2017 that has continued to deliver benefits, including improved outcomes. The program's platform allows an unprecedented partnership for care between bedside and virtual nurses who share responsibilities for medical-surgical and telemetry units.

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## **BAYCARE'S VIRTUAL NURSE PILOT PROGRAM PLEASES PATIENTS AND NURSES**

In August 2022, BayCare piloted a virtual RN role largely staffed by current RNs temporarily unable to deliver bedside care. These RNs complete admission, discharge and other tasks using a mobile computer on the unit that connects to the virtual RN's monitors. The participating nurses reflected that they like the opportunity to serve their patients in a different way and appreciate breaking up the daily schedule between the bedside and virtual shifts. The pilot project found that by using nurses familiar with a team and with a specific unit helps the communication and coordination on behalf of patients.

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## **TRANSFORMING HEALTH CARE DELIVERY THROUGH VIRTUAL CARE**

By taking advantage of advances in medical technology, paired with the expertise of its clinicians, Atrium Health (now part of Advocate Health) has spearheaded virtual care initiatives throughout the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama and beyond that offer cost-effective and efficient solutions to industry-wide problems, including clinical staff shortages and burnout. More importantly, it is delivering convenient access to care for the most vulnerable members of the communities it serves – addressing the medical needs and social determinants of health that influence well-being and quality of life for those who are underprivileged or who have a generational or cultural distrust of institutional health systems. Through these efforts, Atrium Health is achieving better health outcomes and measurable increases in satisfaction among patients and staff.

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## **MAYO CLINIC'S ADVANCED CARE AT HOME**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Mayo Clinic piloted a multi-site virtual nursing model to maintain high levels of patient care while also helping with their recruitment and retention efforts. The virtual RNs are responsible for work relating to admissions, discharges and transfers, as well as education and mentorship of bedside nurses. Bedside RNs were surveyed and reported that they valued the consistent availability of having the virtual RNs' expert nursing knowledge and virtual assistance with nursing tasks.