

Client success story

# Saint Luke's Health System addresses nursing shortages and transforms patient care



**Industry:** Non-profit healthcare organization

**Size:** 16 hospitals and campuses with 1,349 licensed beds

**Products:** Inpatient Connected Care

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Saint Luke's was facing a critical nursing shortage, and the COVID-19 pandemic only amplified the issue by creating an unprecedented increase in patient volume. We knew we needed a solution that could help us address these challenges while also providing quality care to our patients.”

**- Deborah Gash, SVP Chief, Digital Health Officer, Saint Luke's Health System, Kansas City, MO**

## Summary

In the summer of 2019, Saint Luke's Health System initiated research for development of a new, virtual nursing platform on a medical observation unit in February 2021. **The organization partnered with Teladoc Health to build a virtual care inpatient solution to meet the changing needs of its community and work toward a new innovative care model.**

The innovative virtual nursing unit that resulted was successful in addressing two major issues: a dramatic increase in patient volume due to COVID, and a critical nursing shortage leading to workforce burnout.

In February 2021, Saint Luke's launched a virtual nursing program to address nursing shortages and transform patient care. By using in-room monitors as telehealth endpoints, clinicians were able to provide care virtually while virtual nurses were able to support bedside nurses with non-hands-on tasks such as education, documentation, admission, and discharge.

Through a very challenging period, the virtual nursing program experienced improved patient and nurse satisfaction as well as care quality and safety, while simultaneously increasing efficiency, reducing fatigue and creating a better work environment.

## The critical state of the nursing shortage amidst the pandemic

The nursing shortage reached critical levels as the healthcare industry battled the COVID-19 pandemic, an aging population and a workforce exodus.

In 2021, as many as 22% of new nurses were likely to leave their current position within the following year due to insufficient staffing levels, the intensity of the workload and the emotional toll of the job.<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects an average of 203,200 openings for registered nurses each year mostly due to retirees leaving the workforce. At the same time, historically high patient volumes have dramatically increased nursing demand while placing enormous additional stress on the system.

Saint Luke's also faced the challenges of introducing a new system to staff that was accustomed to its current processes. Here as well, staffing and retention were potential issues, with the difficulty of recruiting nurses who were willing to upend a familiar workplace and embrace this new model of delivering care.

**2,340**

AVERAGE INPATIENT  
VIRTUAL CARE ENCOUNTERS  
PER MONTH<sup>2</sup>

**44%**

INCREASE IN THE NUMBER  
OF PATIENT DISCHARGES  
BEFORE NOON<sup>2</sup>

**20%**

FASTER OVERALL  
RESPONSE TIME<sup>2</sup>

## Virtual nursing successfully addresses nursing shortages and enhances patient care

Saint Luke's helped address these challenges with the Teladoc Health Inpatient Connected Care solution, which includes virtual nursing. Saint Luke's prepared its staff for the new solution with thorough training sessions geared to a team that was relatively new to virtual care.

Experiential learning included training on the technology used, orientation with the virtual nurses onsite at the hospital to learn the facility and its processes, practice using the EMR, building rapport with staff and assisting with ED holds.

To gain buy-in and address cultural issues, Saint Luke's hosted a teambuilding day with both virtual and bedside staff. They each received information clearly defining responsibilities and shared duties, allowing all nursing staff to focus on quality patient care.

To help with the rollout, Saint Luke's created information cards for patients that outlined how to use the new system. Patients were to call a bedside nurse if they needed immediate assistance, experienced a new symptom or if they required the restroom or mobility assistance, room supplies, medication, or help with physical features of the patient room. They were to call for a virtual nurse if they needed to update loved ones, or if they had questions about medications, lab results, procedures, diet, admissions and their care plan or discharge.

## Expanding capacity for improved experiences

Within the first two weeks of launching the Teladoc Health virtual care program, anecdotal feedback from patients and nurses began flowing in. Patients said they loved being able to reach out to a virtual nurse, formed good relationships with them and felt it resulted in their best hospital stay.

Bedside nurses also shared that they appreciated the support of virtual nurses who completed much of the paperwork and handled many patient questions, allowing bedside nurses to focus on hands-on, high-quality patient care. This in turn resulted in greater patient and nurse satisfaction, improved quality and safety, expanded workforce engagement, a better work environment, broader recruitment capabilities and reduced intellectual fatigue.

The uptick in cost for employing both bedside and virtual nursing staff was mitigated by the increased capacity it offered to bedside nurses who were able to increase their patient load from four to five.

Saint Luke's is currently expanding their inpatient virtual care to other areas of patient care to ensure they can continue transforming the patient care experience and providing the highest quality of care.

### Bedside RN

- Physical assessment
- Med administration
- Hands-on patient education

- Patient rounds
- Educate patients
- Pain reassessment
- Shift goal
- Dual sign off

### Virtual RN

- Admission database
- Med reconciliation
- Set goals
- Chart audits and interventions
- Manage discharge process / education
- Code support



Teladoc Health's virtual care inpatient solution has been instrumental in addressing industry-wide challenges while still providing high-quality care. The virtual nursing unit has not only helped us expand our capacity to care for more patients, but it has also reduced the workload and burnout of our nursing staff. We are grateful for this partnership and look forward to continuing to work together to improve patient outcomes and experiences."

**- Deborah Gash, SVP Chief, Digital Health Officer, Saint Luke's Health System, Kansas City, MO**

<sup>1</sup>Berlin, Gretchen et al. "Nursing in 2021: Retaining the healthcare workforce when we need it most," McKinsey & Company, May 11, 2021

<sup>2</sup>Based on client data

The testimonials, opinions and statements reflect one customer's personal experience with Teladoc Health. Results and experiences may vary from customer to customer and will be unique to each customer. The testimonials are voluntarily provided and are not paid.

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