Strategy 15
Expand opportunities for non-traditional employment schedules and settings and increase family-friendly workplace policies

Strategy 15.2 The North Carolina Organization of Nurse Leaders should work with associations representing employers of nurses and other nursing partners to identify opportunities for sharing innovations in nursing roles in a variety of practice settings to expand opportunities for workforce flexibility and improvements in patient care.

Desired Result
Successful efforts to adopt innovative nursing roles and increase flexibility for nurses will be effectively disseminated statewide.

Why does the task force recommend this strategy?
As health care environments evolve, so too must the roles and practices of nurses to meet emerging challenges and opportunities. Sharing innovative practices allows for the cross-pollination of ideas, techniques, and solutions that can address common issues, improve efficiency, and elevate the quality of patient care. Furthermore, such exchanges can reveal new pathways for career development and specialization for nurses, encouraging professional growth and adaptability. This collaborative approach to innovation in nursing can significantly contribute to a more resilient, responsive, and patient-centered health care system and identify opportunities for flexibility for nurses.

Context
Health care delivery evolves at a rapid pace, and nurses are often frontline partners in developing new and creative models of patient care. Several relatively new but growing models of care exemplify this trend, including telehealth, virtual nursing, hospital at home, and mobile health clinics. These approaches to patient care vary in purpose and in the extent to which they have been tested and adopted, but all appear to be promising in terms of the opportunities provided for flexibility in nursing care delivery as well as the advantages offered to patients.

Telehealth Nursing Roles

- Triage
- Health education
- Medication management
- Discharge follow-up
- Bedside rounds facilitation for isolated patients
- Telemetry
- Remote monitoring of patient data
- Care coordination
- Consultation to providers in other locations
- Care management
- Telehealth program management

Note - list adapted from table I Rutledge CM, Gustin T. Preparing Nurses for Roles in Telehealth: Now is the Time. OJIN. !https://ojin.nursingworld.org/table-of-contents/volume-26-2021/number-1-january-2021/preparing-nurses-for-roles-in-telehealth-now-is-the-time/

TELEHEALTH
The U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration defines telehealth as "the use of electronic information and telecommunication technologies to support long-distance clinical health care, patient and professional health-related education, health administration, and public health".[90] Several developments generally fall under this term, including live video appointments, asynchronous transmission of images/videos to providers, remote patient monitoring, and mobile health applications.[91]

Several studies have found that nurses are generally supportive of telehealth adoption and believe that time-saving technologies hold the potential to help decrease workload.[92] In some cases, telehealth can facilitate safety improvements and decreased levels of distress, such as through the ability to remotely triage COVID-19 patients.[93] However, lack of technology training (for nurses and/or patients) can become a significant barrier to a positive telehealth experience if adequate technical support is not available. Resource limitations in rural and medically underserved areas can also present challenges for nurses who serve these communities.

VIRTUAL NURSING
Virtual nursing differs from telehealth in that these programs typically add to traditional in-person, hospital-based care teams, rather than substituting for in-person care.[94] Typically, a virtual nurse works at an offsite center but has access to patients' electronic health records and can remotely collaborate with in-person bedside nurses to complete admissions, update patients and families on the plan of care, facilitate discharge planning, and perform other hands-off roles.

Both virtual nursing and telehealth nursing offer nurses the opportunity to remain active in patient care and mentorship without the physical demands of bedside nursing. These roles may be attractive to older nurses or those who have health conditions that make working at the bedside challenging. While patient education on what virtual nurses can do requires some additional patient-provider communication, high patient and physician satisfaction have been observed in tests of virtual nursing.

NEED FOR DISSEMINATION AND BEST PRACTICE SHARING
The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the testing and adoption of several of the above approaches to nursing care. However, not all health care organizations have the resources to develop and pilot innovative programs and thoroughly evaluate their impact on patient outcomes, process measures, and cost. Many organizations could benefit from the expansion of successful pilots beyond their initial locations. Furthermore, much remains to be learned about best practices for implementing innovative nursing roles and flexible workforce solutions across health settings, particularly in smaller and safety net organizations serving communities with lower access to technology.[95]

NC Spotlight: Center for Virtual Care Value and Equity (ViVE)

UNC Chapel Hill has begun a five-year process of establishing the Center for Virtual Care Value and Equity with funding from the National Institutes of Health's National Center for Advancing Translational Sciences. The center will generate data needed to study issues related to adoption and sustainability of virtual care programs, with a focus on equity and underserved populations. Students and researchers interested in virtual nursing will benefit from local expertise and training opportunities.

-UNC Research. $3.7M in NIH funding will establish first-of-its-kind virtual care center at Carolina. https://research.unc.edu/2023/08/08/3-7m-in-nih-funding-will-establish-first-of-its-kind-virtual-care-center-at-carolina/

NC Spotlight: Minerva's Mobile Health

A partnership between **UNC Greensboro (UNC-G) School of Nursing** and **Cone Health** transformed an RV into a clinic on wheels with grant funding from the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration. Nicknamed Minerva's Mobile Health, the mobile clinic travels to communities in eight counties, providing services such as physicals, primary care, and chronic disease care and education. UNC-G nursing and nurse practitioner students can serve with Minerva's Mobile Health and gain exposure to mobile clinic care during clinical rotations.

-Pounds J. New UNCG mobile medical clinic will provide free health services in underserved areas. https://greensboro.com/news/local/education/uncg-mobile-clinic-health-minerva/article_ab5d11e0-387d-11ee-a723-abb8bdf035ff.html

NORTH CAROLINA ORGANIZATION OF NURSE LEADERS (NCONL)

The North Carolina Organization of Nurse Leaders (NCONL) functions as the statewide branch of the American Organization for Nursing Leadership and advocates for nurse leaders in the state as they influence health care through their expertise and innovation. The organization supports nurses pursuing opportunities for professional development, engaging in research, and shaping health care policy.

NCONL has already taken a lead in dissemination of innovative ideas and best practices for the nursing workforce, a goal that aligns with the national organization's workforce initiative. To gather information about initiatives across the state, the NCONL Practice Committee has created a short survey for members about projects to improve retention, engagement, and workplace culture or environment. After receiving information from nurse leaders via the survey, the organization interviews the initiative owner and creates a standardized document highlighting

key findings, implications for nurse leaders, important references, and a contact person. These forms will be compiled on the NCONL website to enable easy sharing of best practices with nurse leaders statewide.

OTHER PARTNERS FOR INNOVATION DISSEMINATION

In addition to NCONL, several other organizations bring together leaders in innovative thinking and may serve as assets in sharing new ideas with their member organizations. These partners include:

- **NC Healthcare Association (NCHA)**
- **NC Health Care Facilities Association (NCHCFA)**
- **Association for Home Care and Hospice of NC (AHHC of NC)**
- **NC Community Health Center Association (NCCHCA)**

NC Spotlight: Novant Health

"Like many hospitals, we are facing high turnover of experienced nurses, increased use of contract labor, and a record high number of new graduate nurses. From our new graduate nurse survey, we overwhelmingly heard them voice concerns about lack of available resources when they are off orientation. The lack of preceptors and experienced nurses on nights and weekends was problematic, as this is where most of our new graduate nurses begin their careers. Our goal was to provide support in the form of a resource nurse to give direction and guidance. In November 2023, the role of Clinical Support Nurse (CSN) was launched. These experienced nurses are available 24/7 to answer clinical questions. CSNs are physically located at our 3 largest facilities but are available for consultation by phone or video with any nurse at any of our 14 hospitals. Nine nurses were hired with backgrounds in adult acute care, critical care, and emergency services, as those areas are heavily saturated with new graduates. We are collecting data on the number and types of calls to the Clinical Support Team and nursing satisfaction with the program. Our first satisfaction surveys have been unanimously positive with comments like, 'We have needed someone like this for a long time' and 'It is great to know I have a resource now that I am off orientation without a preceptor'. The CSN has participated in virtual consults between hospitals and markets, as well as providing one on one in person assistance. While this program originally was created as an added support for new graduates, we have seen requests from more seasoned nurses, too."

-Personal communication with Novant Health corporate manager for the Center for Professional Practice and Development, Rhonda Rychlik. March 28, 2024.

🔑 KEY RESOURCE NEEDS

💲 Health care philanthropies, working with health care and nursing researchers, can support pilot programs in developing practice models (e.g., virtual nursing) by tracking patient outcomes, patient experiences, workforce data, and potential cost savings, as well as sharing best practices with organizations interested in using these models.