

# UPMC HEALTH PLAN



## Addressing the Ongoing Nursing Shortage through an Innovative Virtual Discharge Program

UPMC Health Plan, headquartered in Pittsburgh, Penn., is among the nation's fastest-growing health plans, and is also owned by the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center (UPMC), making it part of an integrated delivery network (IDN). Like many IDNs, UPMC has not been exempt from the Great Resignation, especially among its nursing staff. "We are seeing nursing vacancies and a surge in nurses opting to transition to travel nursing," says Shannon Seitz, RN, Unit Director at UPMC Passavant. "There's a very valid concern around how we can successfully continue to provide safe, high-quality care to our patients. But these challenges have also created an environment that is ripe for innovation."

In December 2021, UPMC Health Plan partnered with UPMC Passavant Hospital on a virtual discharge pilot to help combat nurse burnout and solve for the ongoing

nursing shortage. The pilot focused on a 30-bed inpatient unit specialized in orthopedics and urology. Because of its high throughput of patients—nurses regularly discharge more than half their patients on any given day—the unit made the perfect environment to test the effectiveness of a virtual discharge pilot.

**"Our nurses didn't feel they had enough time to sit with a patient uninterrupted for 35-40 minutes to go over discharge instructions," says Seitz. "And on the patient experience side, you don't want them to feel rushed."**

To assist these nurses, the IDN decided to leverage its UPMC Health Plan nurses, who have very diverse clinical backgrounds and currently were functioning as case managers, to assist in discharging patients.

The unit nurses use a laptop to connect patients with UPMC Health Plan nurses through the UPMC Health Plan telehealth platform, AnywhereCare. The virtual program also allows the patient's family or caregiver to join the virtual discharge remotely. The health plan nurses are all trained on the discharge process, including provider preferences based on surgery type and physician. "As a nurse and a leader of nurses, I can tell you that nurses like to own the care that they provide, so buy-in was a little bit of a challenge at first," remembers Seitz. "But once we started the pilot, and saw that patients were very satisfied and nurses got time back in their day, the buy-in quickly came."

From December 2021 to May 2022

