Innovation Under Pressure: Building a Sustainable Nursing Future

Virtual Nursing Case Study | Salem Health

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About Salem Health

Salem Health is a 669-bed, community-based nonprofit health system serving Oregon's Mid-Willamette Valley. Salem Health, the parent organization of the Magnet-designated Salem Hospital, is recognized for its commitment to nursing excellence, innovation, and patient-centered care. The system operates one of the busiest emergency departments on the West Coast, serving a large rural and agricultural population with high care demands.

The Challenge: Urgency Meets Regulation

In 2023, Oregon passed House Bill 2697, establishing strict nurse-to-patient ratios and guaranteed breaks. For Salem Health, compliance required significant investment in nursing resources and staffing models. The executive team needed a sustainable solution that could relieve nurse burden and ensure compliance.

2023: Law Passed
Mandatory ratios and guaranteed breaks established

2024-2025: Implementation
Phased rollout across Oregon healthcare facilities

Mid-2025: Full Enforcement
Penalties begin for non-compliance

> We had months, not years, to find a solution that would fundamentally change how we deliver nursing care.
>
> – Sean Johnson
> Chief Applications Officer
> Salem Health

As a lean, data-driven organization, Salem Health sought a sustainable path forward that wouldn't rely solely on increasing headcount. They set an audacious goal: launch hospital-wide Virtual Nursing by June 30, 2025.

The Solution: Virtual Nursing as a Staffing Multiplier

In July 2024, Salem Health issued an accelerated RFP, prioritizing rapid deployment, Epic integration, and minimal IT overhead. After site visits and peer consultations, Salem Health partnered with Caregility to enable its virtual nursing model to support staffing and safety goals.

Caregility's Connected Care™ Platform offered an integrated, web-based solution that could scale quickly and integrate seamlessly with Epic and nurse call systems. The subscription-based model eliminated large upfront capital expenses.

Operational Impact — Patient Flow

At a Glance

- 30-60 minutes saved per discharge
- $13–$30 per minute saved
- 2.1 FTEs preserved per two units

> Our goal wasn't to chase a technology trend; it was to create a sustainable model that supports our nurses and ensures safe, reliable care for our patients.
>
> – Sean Johnson
> Chief Applications Officer
> Salem Health

Rapid Rollout: From Concept to Go-Live

By November 2024, Salem Health had equipped two 30-bed medical-surgical units (60 rooms) with Caregility APS200 Duo edge devices. Installations averaged six rooms per day, minimizing disruption. The pilot phase was extended through June 2025 to allow for evaluation and refinement prior to expansion.

Integration Ecosystem

- **Epic:** Secure Chat, Haiku, Canto, Hyperspace
- **Vocera:** Hands-free alert routing
- **Hillrom:** Visual indicators for virtual sessions
- **Propio:** Integrated interpreter services

Initial Virtual Nursing Workflows

- Discharge Management
- Discharge Education
- Admissions
- Break Coverage

This ecosystem allowed virtual nurses to participate directly in bedside workflows and patient education, maintaining continuity across teams.

Results: Quantifying Impact

Salem Health's Test of Change (TOC) produced measurable results in under six months:

Metric	Outcome
Discharges Supported Virtually	93%
Admissions Supported Virtually	52%
Nursing Burden	11% reduction
Average Discharge Time	25% reduction in order-to-discharge time
Estimated Time Savings	30-60 minutes saved per discharge
Associated Savings	$13–$30 per minute saved
FTE Efficiency	2.1 FTEs preserved per two units

> We saved about $250,000 in just the first few months. The more we scale, the more time we give back to the bedside. The ROI proof gave us confidence to make virtual nursing a cornerstone of our operational strategy.
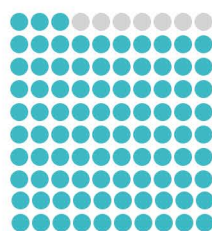>
> **– Sean Johnson**
> **Chief Applications Officer**
> **Salem Health**

These results helped Salem Health secure executive approval to expand Virtual Nursing to an additional 280 beds by the end of 2025, with a phased rollout targeting all 340 inpatient beds across five adult units.
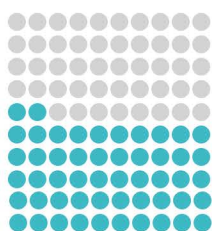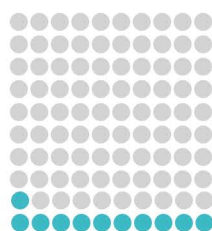
52%
Admissions Supported
Virtual nursing assistance rate

93%
Discharges Supported
Virtual nursing coverage achieved

11%
Nursing Burden Reduction
Measured decrease in bedside workload

As of September 2025, Salem Health's Virtual Nursing program has demonstrated consistent high performance across two high-acuity medical-surgical units (A3E and ASE).

Operational and Cultural Wins

Beyond financial savings, Salem Health realized meaningful improvements in staff experience and care quality:

Improved Coverage
Consistent break coverage with reduced missed lunches per floor

HCAHPS Scores
Improved HCAHPS Discharge Information and Communication scores

Barcode Scanning
Sustained barcode scanning and medication timeliness compliance

Reduced Boarding
Reduced ED boarding times through faster discharges and throughput

Keys to Success

1. **Executive Sponsorship & Governance:** Weekly cross-functional meetings between IT, nursing, and operations (30–40 participants) kept momentum high and decisions aligned.

2. **Lean, Data-Driven Deployment:** Salem used Toyota-style Test of Change cycles to validate workflows before scaling.

3. **Integrated Platform & Support:** Combining hardware, software, and managed services under one vendor simplified deployment.

4. **Flexible SaaS Model:** Caregility's subscription-based Accelerated Adoption Program (AAP) ensured Salem Health had the latest AI-ready edge technology without repeated capital investment.

Looking Ahead

This initiative is part of Salem Health's broader operational strategy to create sustainable staffing models. The health system's Virtual Nursing program continues to evolve as a cornerstone of sustainable nursing operations. Looking ahead, the health system aims to expand workflows to include remote clinician rounding, Meds-to-Beds pharmacy education, second verification workflows, and AI-powered features, such as real-time translation and auto-generated nurse summaries.

> Virtual Nursing is more than comparable to in-person nursing in its impact and quality. The real win is in all the other pathways we can engage patients without time and space being a constraint.
>
> **– Sean Johnson**
> **Chief Applications Officer**
> **Salem Health**