



# UnityPoint Health – Allen Hospital

Relieving nurse burden and strengthening safety

## Organization overview

UnityPoint Health - Allen Hospital is a 204-bed, not-for-profit community hospital serving the Cedar Valley in northeast Iowa. It is an affiliate hospital of UnityPoint Health, which cares for one of every three patients in Iowa. Allen Hospital is the busiest hospital in the Cedar Valley and cares for more inpatients, outpatients, emergency patients and cardiac patients than any other hospital in the 10-county service area.

## Challenges

- Decrease the burden on frontline care teams caused by staffing shortages
- Ensure security and safety for staff, patients, and visitors

## Vocera Solution

- Virtual nurse program
- Vocera communication device
- Vocera mobile application

## Results\*

- **22-minutes saved** per bedside nurse per patient discharge, on average
- **12-minutes saved** per bedside nurse per patient admission, on average
- **7.64% increase in HCAHPS** scores related to communication with patients on medications
- **Staff feel safer** at work

## Challenges

Major challenges faced by healthcare organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic include preventing staffing shortages and ensuring security and safety in the workplace.<sup>1</sup>

“We decided early on that we weren’t just going to let the pandemic happen to us,” said Sarah Brown, RN, MSN, CMPE, Chief Nursing Officer at UnityPoint Health – Allen Hospital, a 204-bed hospital in northeast Iowa. “We weren’t going to be victims of the nursing shortage. We were going to be as creative and innovative as we possibly could to decrease the burden on our frontline care teams.”

## Vocera Solution

A longtime user of Vocera technology, UnityPoint Health – Allen Hospital leadership decided to leverage their Vocera solution in an inventive way to save bedside nurses’ valuable time. They implemented a virtual nurse program to make work for bedside staff easier and less complex, while leveraging their existing full time nursing staff. The virtual nurse conducts all patient admission and discharge duties, freeing the bedside nurse from lengthy engagements and allowing them to provide hands-on patient care.

Using the hands-free, wearable Vocera communication device, a bedside nurse can simply say, “call virtual nurse” or use the Vocera mobile application to connect with the virtual nurse. The virtual nurse can also see when patient admissions are coming in and proactively contact the assigned bedside nurse on their Vocera app or Vocera communication device and offer to handle the admission.

The virtual nurse communicates with the patient and conducts the admission assessment questions and discharge instructions via webcam. After the virtual nurse has conducted the patient admission, they can flag any significant findings about the patient to the bedside nurse, who receives a message on their Vocera communication device or Vocera app. The virtual nurse is also the person who walks the patient through their discharge information, including medication instructions, follow-up appointments, and any other care plan guidelines.

“Something essential to us in developing our virtual nurse program was making sure it was easy and useful for our nurses,” said Cole Malcolm, MHA, Administrative Fellow at UnityPoint Health. “We leveraged our Vocera solution because it’s a technology our nurses use regularly to communicate throughout their shifts. It was key for us to find a solution that would help nursing staff make the most of their time since they juggle so many patients and responsibilities.”

Ensuring security and safety in the workplace for staff is another priority for the hospital’s leadership team. The organization has a safety and security team dedicated to providing a safe environment for care team members, patients and visitors. All members of the safety and security team wear the Vocera communication device, including members of police staff, security officers, and rounding safety technicians. Rounding safety technicians are specialists trained on how to deescalate potentially violent situations. They round on all units throughout the hospital every day to calculate patients’ risk for becoming aggressive and proactively prevent workplace violence.

## Results\*

UnityPoint Health - Allen's Hospital's virtual nurse program has been a great success and has helped lighten the workload for bedside nurses, freeing them of time-consuming patient admission and discharge responsibilities. The virtual nurse provides the bedside nurse with an extra set of eyes and ears, which boosts patient care quality and safety.

"The virtual nurse might notice that a medication dose is wrong or that a patient has an incorrect code status," said Malcolm. "They can make the correction in the patient's chart and use Vocera technology to let the bedside nurse know. The additional help allows our nurses to provide the very best patient care."

The virtual nurse program has also helped patients feel more connected to their care team because they can interact with a nurse over video who isn't wearing a mask.

In addition to providing nursing staff with additional resources to help with the burden of burnout and staffing shortages, the safety and security team helps staff feel safe at work.

"We all have the ability to use the panic feature on our Vocera communication devices," said Brown. "Staff know they can quickly and discreetly contact our safety and security team with the push of a button because Vocera technology provides a stable lifeline – you never feel isolated in dangerous situations."

# 22

Minutes saved

per bedside nurse per patient discharge, on average

# 12

Minutes saved

per bedside nurse per patient admission, on average

# 7.64%

Increase

in HCAHPS scores related to communication with patients on medications

\*In addition to Vocera technology, the facility's results may reflect the additional training, policies, procedures and specific configuration parameters implemented by the facility. The results are not necessarily representative of what another facility may experience



### Citations

1. CHEN, Shu-Ching; LAI, Yeur-Hur; TSAY, Shioh-Luan. "Nursing Perspectives on the Impacts of COVID-19." Journal of Nursing Research: June 2020 - Volume 28 - Issue 3 - p e85. [https://journals.lww.com/jnr-twna/Fulltext/2020/06000/Nursing\\_Perspectives\\_on\\_the\\_Impacts\\_of\\_COVID\\_19.2.aspx](https://journals.lww.com/jnr-twna/Fulltext/2020/06000/Nursing_Perspectives_on_the_Impacts_of_COVID_19.2.aspx)

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"Our Vocera system was integral before the pandemic and still is today. We wear Vocera devices as part of our PPE to provide safe and efficient care. It is an essential technology – I don't know how we would operate without Vocera."

– **Sarah Brown, RN, MSN, CMPE**  
Chief Nursing Officer at UnityPoint Health – Allen Hospital



"Several members of our staff had used Vocera technology at previous hospitals and shared how well the solution worked to streamline communication. Hearing about how great the technology was made choosing an easy decision for our organization."

– **Sara Kazmierczak, RN**  
Chief Nurse Officer  
North Valley Health Center

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