# Virtual Nursing in Philadelphia Hospitals: Navigating Challenges and Promises of Remote Care Models



**Virtual Nursing in Philadelphia Hospitals: A New Approach to Addressing Nurse Shortages**

**Location:** Penn Medicine Rittenhouse, 1800 Lombard Street, Philadelphia, PA

**Date:** May 13, 2024

**Context:** Penn Medicine has launched a "virtual nursing" program aimed at alleviating nurse shortages by utilizing technology. This initiative is part of the broader trends in Philly-area hospitals exploring the potential benefits and challenges of remote nursing models.

**Details:** Lauren McNeal, a registered nurse at the Center for Connected Care, monitors patients across multiple facilities from a control center. Each nurse can oversee up to a dozen patients through screens installed in patient rooms. This approach aims to improve efficiency and reduce nurse workload.

However, some complications have arisen. For example, Abington Hospital in Montgomery County encountered safety issues when using carts with 8-foot power cords in behavioral health settings, which posed a strangulation risk. In response, the hospital removed the problematic equipment. Additionally, Penn Medicine has found that the physical bulk of the equipment challenges the efficiency gains hoped for.

Dr. Ann Huffenberger, director of the Penn Center for Connected Care, noted that while the technology promised increased efficiency, the reality did not always meet expectations.

**Research and Development:** Philly-area hospitals continue to refine their virtual nursing programs. Simultaneously, a recent study at Penn Medicine reviewed how algorithms can impact racial biases in healthcare, with findings indicating that algorithm intention plays a significant role in either reducing or exacerbating disparities.

**Funding:** NIH has awarded $5.5 million to a Philadelphia partnership focused on chronic illness management, emphasizing the role of community health workers in educating patients and facilitating peer support networks.

**Conclusion:** The introduction of virtual nursing aims to address critical staffing shortages in a resource-efficient manner, though it presents logistical challenges that hospitals must navigate. Further study and adaptation will be crucial for the success and safety of remote healthcare technologies.