

FINAL APPROVED BY CLIENT

Pathway to Excellence Case Study VA North Texas Health Care System

Located in the heart of Texas, VA North Texas Health Care System (VANTHCS) is a progressive health care provider serving more than 129,000 Veterans annually. As the second largest VA health care system in the country, this 853-bed organization fulfills its mission to provide the right type of care for the best possible health outcomes with attention to the needs and life goals of Veterans.

In 2019, nursing leaders opted to pursue the ANCC Pathway to Excellence® credential, viewing it as an opportunity to formalize existing structures and processes and serve as the framework for organizational change. Results of the health system's self-assessment gave leaders the confidence to set up an aggressive 18-month timeline with the goal of cultivating a work environment filled with highly engaged and empowered nursing personnel. In September 2020, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, VANTHCS achieved its first Pathway to Excellence designation.

Fostering Resilience and Trust

With an emphasis on fostering resilience during times of unplanned change, the Pathway framework gave nurses the confidence to embrace the pandemic with a high level of trust. Front-line staff moved from the bedside to the boardroom as collaborative partners, developing strategies that incorporated nurses' safety, well-being, and professional development. Nurses were well protected with the proper PPE and given a platform to express concerns directly to the Emergency Operations Center. In addition, staff nurses were instrumental in the development of comprehensive training modalities and modified care delivery models as the crisis unfolded.

Likewise, the Pathway framework allowed nursing leaders to be proactive in ensuring provisions were in place for the well-being of the team. This included flexible scheduling, programs to compensate employees for time lost due to COVID exposure, and support for staff to care for family members affected by the pandemic. VANTHCS also provided on-site housing, food, exercise equipment, and housing accommodations.

"Every day, our forward-facing staff dedicate themselves unconditionally to our Veterans, and we wanted to ensure we did all we could to provide an extra level of security that would safeguard workforce well-being" says Shirleen L. Smith, MSN-NL, RN, Magnet® and Pathway to Excellence Program Director. "In this, as in other areas, the Pathway standards guided our work."

Nurse-Driven Emergency Operations Plan

As the pandemic gained steam, VANTHCS braced itself not only to protect Veterans and staff, but also to potentially fulfill the VA's "Fourth Mission" to assist the nation in times of emergencies and disasters. Working alongside the CNO, direct care nurses and interdisciplinary team members created the Comprehensive Emergency Operations Plan, which allows the health care system to quickly and safely scale up staffing, resources, resource allocation, care delivery models, and nurse training and deployment.

To safeguard patient care, the plan calls for nursing leaders to screen and match contingency nurses to work in areas closely aligned with their primary or secondary specialties. A direct preceptorship model trained nearly 600 nurses in six weeks to support staffing needs in the ED, Acute Care, and critical care units. Leadership wellness rounds were conducted to assess the psychological well-being of front-line staff, collect feedback, and identify best practices across the health system.

The model below was provided at the VA Central Office, Office of Nursing Service for all facilities to use during the pandemic to allocate staffing resources.

TEAM MODEL

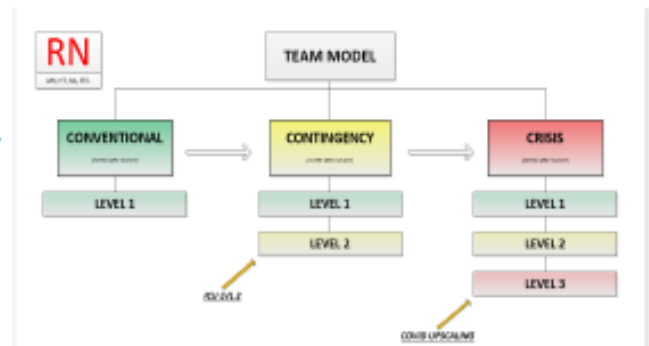
WHO: COM, Point of Service (POS)

WHAT: Overview of the team structure at POS used to guide transition along the continuum of care, from *CONVENTIONAL* to *CONTINGENCY* to *CRISIS*.

WHY: To guide leadership at POS on how to allocate staff based on competency levels.

WHEN: During transition from conventional to contingency or crisis when POS is unable to support itself with intraservice staff.

WHERE: Impacts SOA, leadership, daily staffing, deploying and receiving units, etc.



Pathway's Enduring Value

Enculturating the Pathway framework ensured that VANTHCS was well prepared for COVID's second wave. When cases started to rise, the CNO once again stood up emergency operations as if flipping a light switch. Careful and thoughtful succession planning provided more than 135 nurses to support the COVID Emergency Operations Center. Safety needs were met with little disruption to work-life balance. In fact, the health system was so well equipped it could expand operations to receive non-COVID Veterans and accommodate their care needs. "Thanks to Pathway's supportive structure, our staff entered into the second wave secure in the knowledge that they could endure any adversity," Smith says.

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About VANTHCS

VA North Texas Health Care System covers 38 counties in Texas and two in southern Oklahoma. Accredited by The Joint Commission, this 1A complexity level facility is the second largest VA health care system in the country, serving more than 129,000 Veterans with 1.5 million outpatient episodes of care in FY19. With headquarters in Dallas, other facilities are located in Garland, Bonham, Fort Worth, Tyler, Polk Street, Grand Prairie, and Plano as well as five contract community-based outpatient clinics. A team of approximately 6,275 employees and 1,400 community volunteers provides comprehensive health services through primary, tertiary and long-term care in many areas, including medicine, surgery, mental health and rehabilitation.

The Dallas campus is designated as a Federal Coordinating Center for emergency response and is one of five designated Centers of Innovation by the Office of Patient Centered Care and Cultural Transformation.

About the Pathway to Excellence® Program

The Pathway to Excellence® Program recognizes a health care organization's commitment to creating a positive nursing practice environment. The Pathway to Excellence in Long Term Care® program is the first to recognize this type of supportive work setting specifically in long-term care facilities. Pathway organizations focus on collaboration, career development, and accountable leadership to empower staff. www.nursecredentialing.org/pathway

About ANCC

The mission of the [American Nurses Credentialing Center](http://www.nursecredentialing.org) (ANCC), a subsidiary of the American Nurses Association, is to promote excellence in nursing and health care globally through credentialing programs. ANCC's internationally renowned credentialing programs certify and recognize individual nurses in specialty practice areas. ANCC recognizes health care organizations that promote nursing excellence and quality patient outcomes while providing safe, positive work environments. In addition, ANCC accredits health care organizations that provide and approve continuing nursing education, accredits transition-to-practice programs, and prepares nurses for new practice roles. For more information about ANCC, visit us at nursingworld.org/ancc and follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ANCC). ANCC is the only nurse credentialing organization to successfully achieve ISO 9001:2015 certification.