



2025 Nursing Year in Review



Message from the CNE

As I reflect on this past year, I am filled with pride and gratitude for each of you. Nursing at SSM Health has always been defined by our Values – **compassion, respect, excellence, stewardship, and community** – and in 2025, you lived these Values in extraordinary ways. Every patient you cared for, every family you comforted, and every challenge you navigated with grace have shaped a year of meaningful progress in advancing our Mission.

One of the most powerful reflections of your impact is in our Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems (HCAHPS) Nurse Communication scores, which **rose from 77.29% in Q1 to 79.55% by the end of the year** – a measurable 2.26% improvement. This upward trend reinforces something you instinctively know: when nurses communicate with intention, connection, and clarity, patient trust grows and outcomes improve. Your presence makes a meaningful difference in patient and family experiences every day.

We also strengthened our commitment to professional growth. We saw record participation in our Clinical Ladder Program and growing interest in continued education support, such as the FlexPath Funded and Tuition Reimbursement. This level of dedication speaks volumes about your drive to advance your practice and elevate care for our patients.

These achievements, and so many more highlighted in this Year in Review, are possible because of you. Every day you bring together the art and science of nursing by delivering evidence-based care while providing compassion that cannot be taught. You mentor students and residents, support your teams, adapt quickly in times of change, and remain unwavering advocates for the patients we are called to serve.

As we step into 2026, we will build on this momentum – advancing mobility and patient safety initiatives, supporting professional development, and ensuring every nurse has the tools and resources needed to thrive. **I am energized by the road ahead and grateful to walk it with you.** Please take time to read this review and reflect on your personal impact on these team wins.

With deep gratitude,

Amy Wilson

Amy Wilson, DNP, RN, NEA-BC
Chief Nurse Executive, SSM Health



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Message from SPNPC Chair

My healthcare journey began in a long-term care facility during my teenage years. After several years working as a Certified Nursing Assistant, I pursued my registered nursing degree to further my commitment to patient care. In 2012, I joined SSM Health as a Registered Nurse on the inpatient unit at Monroe Clinic in Wisconsin.

Early in my nursing career, I quickly learned that delivering exceptional patient care requires strong collaboration across disciplines. Working alongside physical therapists, pharmacists, physicians, and many other healthcare professionals became one of the most rewarding aspects of my role. I value the opportunity to bring diverse perspectives together to achieve the best possible outcomes for our patients.

In 2022, I was invited to join the Wisconsin Regional Professional Nursing Practice Council. I welcomed the opportunity to collaborate with nurses across the region to enhance nursing practice at SSM Health. Through this experience, I grew as both a patient advocate and a leader, gaining confidence in the importance and impact of nursing voice at the bedside. I later joined the System Professional Nursing Practice Council (SPNPC) as a Wisconsin representative and, in 2026, became Chair. The SPNPC is composed of bedside nurses from all health ministries who work together to ensure nursing practice is evidence-based and driven by those closest to patient care.

In 2025, the SPNPC leveraged technology to reduce nurses' workload by supporting the implementation of automatic, or "magic," OPAs (Our Practice Advisory). These OPAs are generated through nursing documentation and automatically initiate interdisciplinary consultations. For example, connecting social work and case management to address social determinants of health. The SPNPC also supports Project One: Nurse Well-Being, a systemwide initiative that began as a nursing-focused effort to streamline and improve clinical documentation. Additionally, the council played a key role in supporting the system transition to Ivenix infusion pumps, participating in regional workgroups to evaluate workflows and promote a smooth implementation.

The System Professional Nursing Practice Council is a forum where practicing nurses' voices are heard, valued, and translated into meaningful change. It provides an opportunity to build professional relationships, collaborate with peers, and actively shape nursing practice across SSM Health. I encourage nurses to reach out to their Ministry practice councils or leaders to learn more about how to get involved.

Kind regards,



Sarah Sughrue, RN

Chair, System Professional Nursing Practice Council
SSM Health Monroe Hospital

Our Mission

Through our exceptional healthcare services, we reveal the healing presence of God.

Our Vision

Peace, hope, and health for every person, family and community, especially those most in need.

Our Values

Compassion, Respect, Excellence, Stewardship, and Community

Nursing Statistics

Total working RNs = 14,820

Total RNs hired = 2,145
(1,681 FT/PT) (464 PRN)

Total Internationally Educated Nurses joined team = 3 joined, 13 employed

FT/PT RNs = 9,618

Float Pool RNs = 723

PRN RNs = 2,146

ITP RNs = 13
Internal Travel Program

*Data pulled from System Analytics PowerBI Dashboards, specific to RN job profiles.



Organizational Awards

2025
America's
Greatest
Workplace
for
Inclusion & Diversity

Newsweek

2025
America's
Greatest
Workplace
for
Women

Newsweek

2025
Forbes
Best-in-State
Employer

2025
Becker's Healthcare
Top Places to Work
in Healthcare

2025 Professional Practice Model Awards

The Professional Practice Model (PPM) Awards recognize SSM Health nurses who exemplify our PPM through their consistent, exceptional service to our patients, customers, and the communities we serve.

I am a Professional: Melissa Mays, RN SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital - Oklahoma City

“Working with Melissa over the past year has been a privilege. She’s the kind of nurse who quietly raises the bar for everyone around her — not by demanding perfection, but by consistently showing up, asking thoughtful questions, and doing the right thing even when no one is watching. She is sharp, compassionate, and deeply committed to doing things the right way, always keeping her patients’ best interests at the center.”



a patient almost immediately. Every time we had Madeline as our nurse, the room lit up with hope, joy, and endless support. Madeline is not just a nurse; she is an extraordinary nurse.”

I am Accountable: Sarah Sughroue, RN SSM Health Monroe Clinic Hospital

“Sarah has been instrumental in advancing our team’s success with progressive mobility patients for who are ventilated. This is a challenging initiative that requires significant coordination. Understanding the complexity, Sarah organizes multidisciplinary teams to meet at the bedside to initiate this vital intervention. Her leadership and persistence have led to numerous successful mobilizations, inspiring the rest of the team to adopt the same workflows and improve patient outcomes.”



I am a Leader: Melissa Lifka, RN SSM Health Saint Louis University Hospital

“Before signing my contract, I made an anonymous social media post asking about this unit. Almost all the comments were positive, and nearly all mentioned how good the ‘weekend charge,’ Melissa, is. No matter how challenging the outcomes or how busy she is, she raises the morale of the entire unit. It is nearly impossible to be upset about your situation when your charge nurse is working as hard as she does with a positive attitude. No nurse is ever alone on this unit when Melissa is working. I have traveled many places and worked with many charge nurses over the years, but no one compares to Melissa.”



I am an Advocate: Katie Thomas, RN SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital - Centralia

“As nurses, we often have to discuss hard and uncomfortable things with patients and their families. I have always witnessed Katie doing this with such compassion and empathy. Does Katie have bad days? Of course, but there has never been a day that she does not wear a smile and treat her patients and colleagues with kindness and respect. I think I can speak for our whole team when I say Katie is a blessing to everyone around her.”



I am a Partner: Madeline Irvin, RN SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital

“We were blessed to have Madeline Irvin, RN, as our nurse for many shifts in the PICU. I have never seen a pediatric nurse build a trusting, safe, and inspiring relationship with



2025 DAISY Lifetime Achievement Awards

DAISY Lifetime Achievement Awards recognize SSM Health nurses with more than 25 years of dedication to nursing through active mentorship, role modeling, advocacy for their patients, and promoting a positive image of nursing.

St. Louis

- Judy Cowell, RN, BSN**
SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital
- Nancy Jackson DNP, CNRN, SCRN, ASC-BC**
SSM Health DePaul Hospital - St. Louis
- Trish Weber, RN**
SSM Health St. Clare Hospital - Fenton
- Vickie Sammelman, RN, BSN**
SSM Health St. Joseph Hospital - Lake Saint Louis
- Jennifer Bess, RN**
SSM Health St. Joseph Hospital - St. Charles
- Michelle Smith, RN**
SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital - St. Louis
- Shaun Karleskint, RN**
SSM Health St. Louis Region
- Erin Stopke, RN, MSN**
SSM Health St. Louis Region - Ambulatory

Oklahoma

- John Opichka, RN**
SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital - Oklahoma City
- Julia Cardenas, RN**
SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital - Midwest
- Duke Haley, RN**
SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital - Shawnee
- Cathy Collins, LPN**
SSM Health Oklahoma Region - Ambulatory

Mid-Missouri

- Katie Smith, RN, BSN, VA-BC**

SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital - Jefferson City

Wisconsin

- Sue Missall, RN**
SSM Health Wisconsin Region - Ambulatory

- Laurel Taylor, RN**
SSM Health Monroe Hospital

- Chris Wilson, RN, MSN**
SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital - Madison

- Doris Blumberg, RN**
SSM Health St. Clare Hospital - Baraboo

Southern Illinois

- Brenda Kunick, RN**
SSM Health St. Mary’s Hospital - Centralia
- Brenda Schroeder, RN**
SSM Health Good Samaritan Hospital - Mt. Vernon

Continuum of Care

- Linda Collier, RN**
SSM Health Hospice
- Holly Avery, RN**
SSM Health Home Health

System Health Businesses

- Sheila Boul, RN, BSN**
Clinical Education

2025 Nursing KPIs

SSM Health nurses delivered measurable, systemwide improvements in patient safety and harm reduction, in 2025, **exceeding national benchmarks in key nurse-sensitive indicators** despite increased complexity in patient acuity and care demands. These outcomes reflect disciplined implementation, caregiver engagement, and a deliberate shift from reactive prevention to proactive harm mitigation.



Hospital-Acquired Pressure Injuries (PSI-03)

PSI-03 (hospital-acquired pressure injury rate) is a core CMS Patient Safety Indicator and a significant contributor to PSI-90 composite performance. National benchmark tables from AHRQ demonstrate that rates near 0.7 align with expected national performance for medical-surgical populations when adjusted for risk and length of stay ([CMS Quality Net](#); [AHRQ Quality Indicators](#)).

SSM Health's achievement of its expected goal threshold in 2025 reflects meaningful operational improvements, driven by strong nursing wound care collaboration and thoughtful process redesign.

2025 PSI 03 Rate:
0.67
Performance:
Achieved expected goal threshold

Decrease Total Falls (Fall Rate)

SSM Health achieved a total fall rate of 1.83 per 1,000 patient days, well below the national average of approximately 4.5, and firmly within top-quartile performance at ≤ 2.5 falls per 1,000 patient days ([KPI Depot](#)).

This level of performance reflects early assessment, intentional hourly rounding, and strong interdisciplinary coordination. SSM Health nurses continue to perform at a level consistent with top national systems.

Total Fall Rate
2025: 1.83 falls per 1,000 patient days
2024: Slightly higher
(declining trend year over year)

Decrease Total Falls With Harm Rate (Fall Rate With Harm)

Falls resulting in harm remain one of the most consequential adverse safety events in acute care. Nationally, falls with injury remain a persistent challenge, with benchmarking data showing typical rates of **0.62–0.68 per 1,000 patient days** on general medical units, even as overall fall rates improve ([John Hopkins Nursing](#)).

While overall fall prevention remains a priority, SSM Health intentionally shifted focus in 2025 from preventing falls to also reducing the severity of harm when falls occur – a strategy supported by national evidence. Falls with harm rate decreased significantly, demonstrating meaningful progress in preventing serious injury.

Key nursing-led harm-reduction strategies included:

1. Expanded use of **fall-impact mats** for high-risk patients
2. Consistent post-fall reviews and unit-level learning
3. Reinforced bedside communication of fall risk
4. Increased situational awareness and proactive planning.

This work reflects an important evolution, not only preventing events but also improving outcomes when they cannot be fully avoided.

Falls with Harm Rate
2024: 0.030
2025: 0.020
≈33% reduction year over year

Nursing-led improvement strategies included:

- Earlier identification of skin integrity concerns using “4 Eyes in 4 Hours” method
- Implementation of “turn teams” to ensure high-risk patients are frequently repositioned
- Timely wound care consultation and escalation
- Enterprise standardization of skin and wound care products

These efforts reflect national best practices, as robust nursing engagement is consistently cited as the most critical driver in reducing hospital-acquired pressure injuries ([American Hospital Association](#)).

MRSA Bloodstream Infections

Hospital-onset MRSA bloodstream infections are a priority national harm metric, tracked by CDC's NHSN and included in federal HAI reduction goals. While no prior-year comparison exists for SSM Health, **meeting the 2025 goal in the first year of measurement is a strong performance signal**, particularly given ongoing national variability following pandemic-era disruptions ([U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#)).

Importantly, 2025 was intentionally positioned as a year of discovery rather than narrow remediation.

Vascular Access Learning at Scale

- 500+ vascular access sites observed
- 79 care locations
- Multidisciplinary engagement focused on: Maintenance practices, dressing integrity, and line necessity and surveillance

National research demonstrates that peripheral and central vascular access practices are a meaningful contributor to MRSA-BSI risk, with up to 7% of MRSA bloodstream infections attributed to line-related sources ([CDC](#)). SSM Health's proactive surveillance approach aligns with CDC and SHEA recommendations for risk assessment-driven prevention strategies ([Infection Control & Hospital Epidemiology, 2023](#)).

This foundational learning positions SSM Health for accelerated MRSA-BSI reduction in future years.

2025 MRSA BSI Events: 47
Performance: Achieved system goal threshold
2024 Comparison: Not available (newly measured)

Nurse Retention: Sustaining Stability in a Volatile Market

SSM Health reduced first-year turnover among non-graduate nurses by **nearly 4 percent year over year**, essentially landing at the system's expected performance threshold. This improvement reflects focused investments in onboarding, leader accountability, and early engagement. Data continues to show first-year RN turnover rates exceeding 30% nationally.

The year-over-year reduction represents **meaningful progress toward long-term workforce stability**, especially for experienced hires transitioning into complex care environments. We are committed to creating a culture and environment that nurture a thriving nursing team, and we are encouraged to see more nurses confident in their decision to be part of the team.

First-Year Turnover: Graduate Nurses

SSM Health outperformed its expected goal for first-year graduate nurse turnover in 2025, an achievement that stands out nationally. New graduate retention remains one of the most stubborn workforce challenges in healthcare, with many systems reporting ongoing losses driven by stress, workload, and misalignment between expectations and practice realities.

At SSM Health, graduate nurse turnover improved by more than 6 percentage points, reflecting the collective impact of:

- A robust Nurse Residency Program with structured touchpoints
- Consistent preceptor and educator support
- Intentional focus on confidence, clinical readiness, and professional identity

These results position SSM Health among the top-performing systems for early-career nurse retention, reinforcing the value of sustained investment in transition-to-practice infrastructure.

First-Year Turnover: Non-Graduate Nurses

2025: 28.9%

2024: 32.9%

Goal: 29.8%

First-Year Turnover: Graduate Nurses

2025: 23.2%

2024: 29.7%

Goal: 25%



Psychological Safety: Progress with Opportunity for Growth

Psychological safety, a critical indicator of inclusion, trust, and team effectiveness, improved modestly in 2025, increasing from 70 to 71. While this did not meet our expected threshold, the upward movement is meaningful in context.

Psychological safety refers to an environment where individuals feel comfortable bringing their authentic selves to work and expressing ideas, concerns, and mistakes without fear of negative consequences (Edmondson, 2018). In healthcare, higher psychological safety is associated with stronger staff and patient safety outcomes, faster issue resolution, greater engagement, and increased innovation. It is also foundational to sustaining a culture of safety and high reliability.

At SSM Health, psychological safety is viewed as a long-term culture change goal with multiple developmental stages. Rather than limiting the focus to speaking up about patient safety alone, the Subject Matter Experts (SME) team adopted a broader definition to reflect psychological safety as a driver of inclusion, learning, contribution, and improvement.

They aligned their measurement approach with Clark's *Four Stages of Psychological Safety model*:

- Inclusion
- Learner
- Contributor
- Challenger

After reviewing validated psychological safety surveys and cross-walking them with the 2023 SSM Health Employee Voice Survey, four existing questions were selected to align with each stage of the psychological safety model. Using Employee Voice questions enables baseline comparisons, consistency, and annual trend analysis.

The primary KPI for the nursing dashboard is the Challenger Safety Score:

"I feel comfortable voicing my ideas and opinions even when they are different from others."

The remaining three items were used to assess progress across developmental stages, not as standalone KPIs.

Performance expectations were set with subject-matter expertise:

- +3 points: minimum improvement
- +4 points: expected improvement
- +5 points: exceptional improvement

National research consistently links psychological safety to lower turnover, better error reporting, and stronger safety outcomes, particularly in high-reliability environments such as acute care nursing. Many organizations continue to experience lagging improvements in this domain as teams recover from sustained clinical and operational strain.

Psychological safety strongly influences whether team members submit non-anonymous safety event reports, which are critical for learning, follow-up, and closing the loop. In cultures with higher psychological safety, team members are more willing to report events, especially when blame and shame are actively rejected.

Because near misses represent valuable "no-cost learning opportunities," anonymity rates for both actual events and near misses are used as leading indicators of psychological safety.

Leading indicators tracked monthly anonymously:

1. All event reports
2. Medication events
3. Near-miss events

2024 Baseline for anonymous rates:

- All events: **16.7%**
- Medication events: **18.1%**
- Near misses: **3.3%**

Together, these indicators provide early insight into whether teams feel safe speaking up before culture change is fully reflected in survey outcomes.

2025 Nursing Priorities and Projects

Project One: Nurse Well-Being

Beginning in 2024, SSM Health made a bold investment in nurse well-being by transforming how nurses document care. **Project One: Nurse Well-Being** continues to deliver measurable results - reducing burden, saving time, and strengthening patient-centered practice.

To date, this work saves **23 minutes per nurse, per patient, per shift**, with additional time gains anticipated as future phases are implemented through 2027. This represents a significant return of time to direct patient care.

Impact on Nursing Practice

Documentation was redesigned to be intentional and clinically meaningful. The focus shifted to what matters most for patient safety and decision-making, supporting sound clinical judgment while eliminating unnecessary and duplicative work.

This streamlined approach:

- Improves workflow efficiency
- Reduces documentation burden
- Supports timely, accurate clinical decisions
- Returns nurses to the bedside

Most importantly, it increases meaningful nurse-patient interaction, ensuring patients feel seen, valued, and cared for.

From Nursing Project to System Strategy

One of the most significant outcomes of the nurse well-being work is that it did not stop with nursing documentation. It became the foundation for a broader three-year, systemwide optimization and standardization effort. This expanded work now includes:

- **50+ multidisciplinary specialties**
- **600+ workflows across the care continuum**

The same guiding principles remain central:

- Engage those closest to the work
- Ground decisions in evidence and regulatory standards
- Establish governance structures that sustain change

Nursing Leadership in Action

A defining outcome of this initiative is the continued leadership of clinical nurses guiding interprofessional teams and driving ongoing transformation. **This work has elevated the voice, expertise, and leadership of nurses across SSM Health - reinforcing its critical role in shaping the future of care delivery.**

Predictive Falls Modeling

SSM Health advanced patient safety and nurse efficiency through the successful deployment of a **Fall Risk Predictive Analytics tool**, reinforcing nursing's leadership in leveraging innovation to reduce harm and improve care.

The predictive falls model was piloted at four hospitals, where it demonstrated strong clinical and operational value. Pilot outcomes included:

- Increased nurse trust in fall risk scoring
- Improved ease of scoring and intervention implementation
- Fewer documentation clicks
- Maintenance or reduced rates of falls with harm

Based on these results, the tool was implemented across all inpatient units systemwide in May 2025.

Measurable Impact on Nursing Workflow

The new fall risk model reduced documentation burden, resulting in **293 fewer clicks per nurse, per**

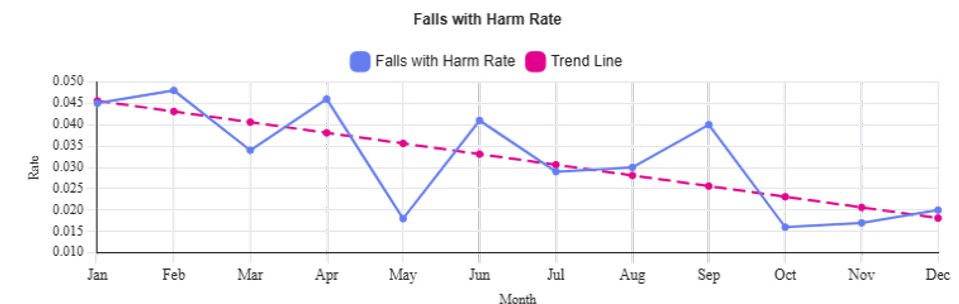
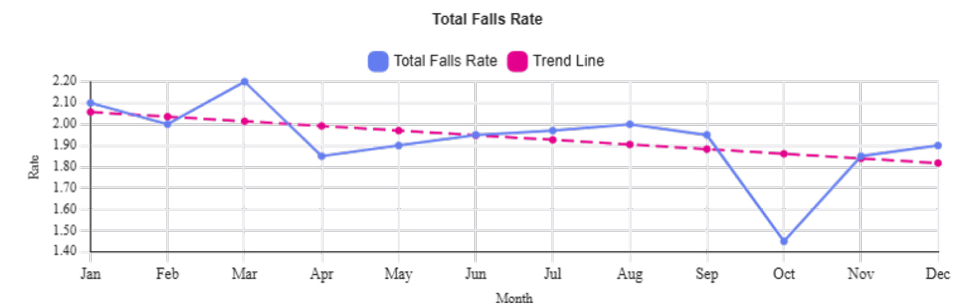
shift. By simplifying assessment and aligning risk scores more closely with clinical judgment, the tool allows nurses to focus less on clicks and more on proactive prevention and direct patient care.

Turning Insight Into Action: Fall Mat Optimization

The pilot phase also identified opportunities for improvement related to fall mats. In response, nurses across the system participated in a hands-on trial of two fall mat products. Clinical team feedback directly informed the selection and systemwide implementation of a new fall mat standard across all hospital ministries.

Following the combined implementation of the predictive falls model and new fall mats, SSM Health achieved a systemwide decrease in both total falls and falls with harm in acute care settings.

This initiative underscores a defining strength of nursing at SSM Health pairing **clinical expertise with data-driven tools** to deliver safer, more efficient care. By engaging nurses in design, testing, and implementation, the Predictive Falls Modeling project delivered results that benefit both patients and caregivers.



Nurse Residency Platform Launch

SSM Health took a significant step forward in supporting new graduate nurses with the launch of a standardized **Nurse Residency Platform**, reinforcing our commitment to nurse development, confidence, and long-term retention.

Elevating the Nurse Residency Program

As part of this work, SSM Health began the Pathway to Practice Transition Accreditation process through the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC). This alignment strengthened program structure and led to the hiring of Nurse Residency Specialists at all acute care ministries and across the continuum of care. This ensures consistent, hands-on support for new graduate nurses during their transition into professional practice.

The program also refined its cohort process, allowing new graduate nurses to build community with their peers while better accommodating in-person classroom learning, supporting an essential component of connection, confidence, and professional identity.

Launching the Nurse Residency Learning Platform

Through a partnership with HealthStream, SSM Health implemented an online nurse residency learning platform designed to scale learning and confidence across key domains:

- Assessment and evaluation
- Clinical practice
- Interprofessional communication
- Professional role development

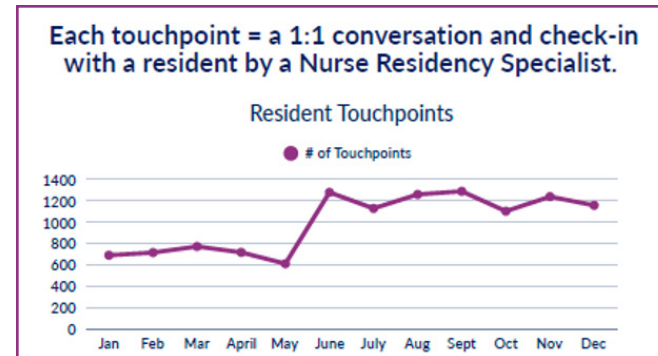
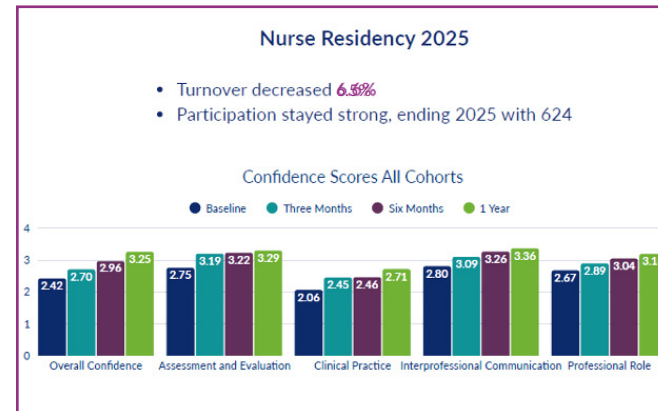
This platform also enabled the program to identify and fill practice-based learning gaps, strengthening readiness at the bedside, and reinforcing consistent expectations across the system.

Measurable Results in 2025

- The impact of these investments was clear:
- Nurse residency turnover **decreased by 6.5%**
- Participation remained strong, ending the year with **624 nurse residents**

- Confidence scores increased across all measured domains from baseline to one year
- Consistent 1:1 touchpoints between nurse residents and Nurse Residency Specialists ensured personalized support throughout the year

Each touchpoint represented intentional coaching, check-ins, and guidance, ensuring that new graduate nurses were supported, seen, and set up for success.



Investing in the Future of Nursing

The Nurse Residency Platform Launch is a critical moment in a nurse's career. The experience of new graduates and the long term stability of the workforce were strengthened by pairing accreditation alignment, dedicated specialist support, and scalable learning technology. This work positions SSM Health to continue developing confident, capable nurses who are prepared to deliver safe, high quality care.

Extern Conversion to New Graduate

In 2025, SSM Health continued to strengthen its nurse extern program as a critical pipeline for transitioning nursing students into successful graduate nurse roles. By combining data transparency, cross-functional partnership, and intentional process design, nursing advanced its ability to convert externs into long term members of the SSM Health team.

Improving Visibility Through Data

In partnership with the Workforce Planning team, the nurse extern program launched a systemwide dashboard in 2025, providing leaders with real time visibility into the current state of the program. The dashboard displays:

- The current number of nurse externs across the system
- Extern to graduate nurse conversion rates
- Year over year trends to support workforce planning decisions

This shared visibility created a common understanding of performance and opportunities, enabling leaders to move from reactive decision making to more proactive interventions.

More Intentional Hiring and Recruitment Practices

Using insights from the dashboard and direct feedback from nurse externs, SSM Health refined its extern hiring approach in 2025. Recruitment and nursing leaders implemented structured guardrails to guide requisition requests and placement decisions, ensuring extern roles are aligned with future workforce needs and realistic conversion opportunities.

This more intentional approach supports both student experience and organizational outcomes, strengthening the transition from externship to professional practice.

Since the launch of the nurse extern conversion strategy in 2023:

- **690 nurse externs have transitioned into graduate nurse roles**
- **In 2025 alone, 229 nurse externs converted to graduate nurse positions**

The Student Nurse Extern Program exemplifies SSM Health's commitment to building the nursing workforce from within. By pairing intentional recruitment, transparent data, and continuous improvement, nursing is creating clearer pathways to practice.



Aspiring Nurse Program

The nursing profession is facing a time where creativity and innovation are needed to meet and sustain workforce needs. **The Aspiring Nurse Program is a bold, systemwide growth and sustainability initiative designed to address the national nursing shortage by building a reliable, community based pipeline of future nurses.** This program represents a strategic approach to developing nurses from within the communities we serve.

Across the U.S., demand for registered nurses continues to outpace supply, with more than 189,000 RN openings projected annually through 2034, while tens of thousands of qualified applicants are turned away from nursing programs each year due to limited faculty and clinical placement capacity (*American Hospital Association [AHA], 2025; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024*). SSM Health is responding to this crisis with direct investments into education, producing a first-of-its-kind partnership with Chamberlain University, creating a seamless employment pipeline program that equips students to begin their nursing careers with confidence.

Program Launch and Early Momentum

The Aspiring Nurse Program officially launched in 2025, with a dedicated program manager in place and standardized processes rapidly established. SSM Health created standard work for candidate interviews and implemented leader interview panels across Oklahoma, St. Louis, Wisconsin, and Illinois, ensuring consistency, equity, and strong clinical engagement in candidate selection.

The program went live across the system in phases. **By the end of 2025, 153 students had been accepted** into the Aspiring Nurse Program across all four regions, including candidates scheduled to begin in 2026.

Strategic Partnerships and Infrastructure

A cornerstone of the Aspiring Nurse Program is SSM Health's academic-practice partnership with Chamberlain University, designed to expand nursing education capacity while delivering practice ready graduates aligned with SSM Health's care delivery model.

As part of program expansion:

- Planning for a Chamberlain campus in Oklahoma has been narrowed to two locations
- Collaboration is underway to recruit SSM Health employees as clinical instructors, further strengthening academic practice integration
- Vendor selection is progressing for a loan repayment and education financing process, addressing one of the most significant barriers to nursing education nationwide (*WICHE, 2023*)

These investments open doors to the nursing profession and provide equitable opportunities through tuition support, local training, and a direct pathway to employment.

Culture, Inclusion, and Engagement

The Aspiring Nurse Program also reflects SSM Health's commitment to culture, inclusion, and belonging. Partnership with the Culture and Inclusion Team helped shape program design to support equitable access, student engagement, and long term enculturation.

Planned initiatives for early 2026 include welcome and engagement events in Oklahoma and St. Louis, strengthening the connection to SSM Health's Mission and Values, and nursing culture before students enter practice. Research consistently shows that early professional socialization improves both retention and engagement among new nurses (*Cousin et al., 2025*).

To ensure long term measurement and accountability, SSM Health is collaborating with Workday to create a program specific reporting flag, enabling tracking of outcomes such as progression, graduation, employment, and retention.

Investing in the Future

The Aspiring Nurse Program positions SSM Health among forward thinking health systems nationwide that are moving beyond short term staffing solutions toward sustainable workforce development. By investing early in students, partnering strategically with academic institutions, and embedding culture and support throughout the journey, SSM Health is strengthening its nursing team.



Nurse Leader Development

At SSM Health, strong nursing leadership is essential to workforce stability, culture, and patient outcomes. By investing early and intentionally in new nurse leaders, our nursing teams can build a sustainable leadership pipeline.

In 2025, we launched the **Nurse Leader Development Program**, a systemwide, first-of-its-kind initiative designed to support nurses transitioning into formal leadership roles across care settings.

Program Design

The Nurse Leader Development Program was intentionally created to provide a structured orientation and development pathway for new nurse leaders, supporting leaders as they grow. The 8-month program – supported by a standardized, purchased curriculum – was designed for nurse leaders across acute care, ambulatory, and continuum of care settings, ensuring consistency while honoring role specific realities.

A defining feature of the program is its nurse led design: nurses teaching nurses, grounded in real world leadership experience and system priorities.

Celebrating the First Cohort

The inaugural cohort successfully completed the eight class series on March 24, 2026.

- **13 nurse leaders** graduated from across **Oklahoma, Wisconsin, St. Louis, Southern Illinois, and Mid Missouri**
- Participants represented diverse care settings and leadership roles
- **12 SSM Health nurse leaders** served as faculty, sharing expertise and practical insight throughout the series

Program evaluations reflected strong engagement and value, with **participants rating the overall experience 86.2% “Good” or “Outstanding.”**

Building Momentum

Building on early success, Cohort 2 will run from April through November 2026, expanding the program’s reach and impact:

- **57 nurse leaders** from all regions will participate
- A new **mentorship component** will provide individualized coaching between classes
- A strengthened evaluation strategy will track leadership outcomes, including:
 - Leader retention
 - Employee Voice Survey results
 - Department level patient clinical outcomes

This expanded approach reinforces SSM Health’s commitment to developing leaders who are prepared to support teams, drive engagement, and deliver safe, high quality care.

Congratulations to Cohort 1 Graduates

Teri Pierce	Kayla Kovacs
Tiffany Castle	Christina Dinkins
Jocelyn Meitzen	Adnela Muratovic
Desi Stensrud	Frankie Lambert
Beth Rozak	Hayley Owens
Autumn Stoflet	Tanya Rollins
Jennifer Zinkle	

Nurse Leader Development faculty

Oklahoma: Kerri Bayer, Angela Strickland, Danielle Covalt, and Kami Boggs

St. Louis: April Hawk, Amanda Kayser, Amy Farr, and Tara Barth

Southern Illinois: Danielle Thompson

Wisconsin: Jenifer Bunker, Lori Cardinal, Toni Schlieve, Elizabeth Waldoch, and Jen Wisotske

Atalan: Reducing Clinical Burnout

Building a Predictable Path to Nurse Well Being

At SSM Health, our nurses are the foundation of safe, compassionate, high quality care. Supporting their well-being is morally imperative and essential to building a sustainable team and strengthening care we provide. In 2025, SSM Health partnered with Atalan, a healthcare analytics company specializing in predictive well-being and retention intelligence, to shift from reactive support to early, proactive intervention.

Why Atalan and Why Now

Historically, clinical burnout and turnover were addressed only after visible signs appeared, limiting effective intervention. Through this partnership, SSM Health aims to make clinician well-being predictable, actionable, and measurable. Atalan uses validated machine learning applied to existing operational data (e.g., EHR and HR systems) to identify patterns linked to burnout and turnover risk – often months in advance – empowering leaders with actionable, upstream insights they can act on beyond traditional surveys.

Proof of Impact: Early Success in Provider Retention

The initial application of Atalan’s Clinician Retention Intelligence platform focused on physicians and advanced practice providers, delivering strong predictive performance and identifying turnover risk more than a year in advance. Early pilots showed meaningful reductions in turnover and improved workforce stability within six months, confirming the value of combining data-driven insights with leadership action.

These outcomes validated what we believed to be possible when we enhanced our analytical capabilities. Data-informed insights, paired with thoughtful leadership action, can change the trajectory of clinician well-being and retention.

Extending the Work to Nursing

As national and regional nursing shortages continue to intensify, SSM Health expanded the Atalan partnership to focus on nursing. Throughout 2025, nurse leaders, bedside nurses, educators, and HR partners collaborated with Atalan to design a Nurse Retention and Well-Being Dashboard built intentionally with nurses, not for them. The design was informed by bedside RN interviews across regions and specialties, as well as leader focus groups, ensuring the dashboard

The platform draws from hundreds of data points already available within our systems, including:

- Missed breaks
- Late call outs
- Increased overtime
- Workload complexity
- Patient acuity
- EHR documentation patterns

Individually, these data points are familiar to nurse leaders, but together, they form a powerful early-warning system for burnout risk. reflects real nursing workflows and lived experience.

What the Nurse Dashboard Delivers

The Nurse Retention and Well-Being Dashboard supports leaders at all levels by enabling early identification of burnout risk across system, department, and individual levels; prioritizing areas for support; and guiding evidence-based interventions. It also facilitates documentation of check ins and tracking of progress over time. .

Future of Atalan at SSM Health

A beta version launched in early 2026 is currently in pilot, with ongoing feedback from nursing and HR leaders to refine the tool before broader deployment. This initiative reflects a fundamental shift – leveraging data and lived experience, and equipping leaders to act early. By investing in early detection, compassionate leadership action, and continuous learning, SSM Health is building a more resilient nursing team.

Workforce Management and Labor Strategy

Nursing played a key role in advancing SSM Health's Ministry Acceleration strategy through Embedded Deployment, systemwide operational standards, an active Nursing Collaborative, and disciplined Sustainable Improvement Plans (SIPs). Together, these efforts strengthened workforce consistency, improved transparency, and supported high quality, efficient care across regions.

Bringing System Standards to the Point of Care

In 2025, nursing integrated into the Business Transformation Office (BTO) Embedded Deployment model, shifting from episodic initiatives to sustained, department-level improvements. Leaders partnered to conduct focused discussions, on-site observations, and data validation to inform staffing and productivity plans.

- St. Louis completed deployment and entered sustainment
- Oklahoma began deployment in Q3, completing onboarding and validation
- Wisconsin advanced readiness and aligned to system standards

2025 Embedded Deployment Metrics

- **19 ministries** engaged in Ministry Acceleration
- **-250 cost centers** engaged in embedded deployment; nursing completed 87 **(53 STL, 17 WI, 17 OK)**
- Standardized use of focused discussions, go and sees, and data driven staffing design

Establishing One System, One Nursing Framework

Nursing led the development of over 300 standardized operational definitions, creating a consistent system framework and reducing variation. Standards addressed productivity metrics, staffing models, roles, and labor definitions, improving transparency and benchmarking. These standards improved transparency, enabled consistent benchmarking, and supported more reliable staffing and financial planning across ministries.

By the end of 2025, nursing operational standards were finalized, reviewed by sponsors, and positioned for system-wide adoption through BTO education and deployment.

2025 Operational Standards Metrics

- 300+ system operational definitions established
- Standardized productivity and staffing methodologies
- Clear definitions for core vs. contingent

Nursing Collaborative Driving System Alignment

The Nursing Collaborative served as the primary forum for system, regional, and health ministry nursing leaders to align on operational standards and support Embedded Deployment and SIP development. Meeting consistently throughout 2025, the Collaborative ensured that standards were clinically grounded, operationally feasible, and supported by nursing leadership.

A major Collaborative achievement was consensus on standardized levels of care, including definitions, skill expectations, and staffing implications for acute, intermediate/progressive, and intensive care settings.

This work directly supported patient flow initiatives, alignment of accommodation codes, and staffing consistency across regions.

The Collaborative also advanced standardization efforts related to charge nurse responsibilities, sitter utilization, rapid response team models, and onboarding and education structures, **ensuring nursing voices shaped system transformation.**

2025 Nursing Collaborative Metrics

- Systemwide alignment on levels of care: Acute, Intermediate, Intensive Care
- Direct input into SIP priorities
- Strong alignment between standards and deployment

Translating Standards into Lasting Results

Sustainable Improvement Plans were the mechanism for converting Embedded Deployment findings into measurable, sustained change. Nursing SIPs were identified through structured deployment activities and aligned to system priorities focused on productivity, quality, workforce stabilization, and risk mitigation.



St. Louis demonstrated strong integration, advancing priorities such as sitter optimization, role standardization, and onboarding improvements. Oklahoma and Wisconsin completed SIP planning and governance, preparing for implementation in 2026.

2025 SIP Metrics

- 7 of 10 recommended STL nursing SIPs supported by the Nursing Collaborative
- Regional SIP governance established with ministry ownership
- Clear transition from deployment to sustainment model
- Nursing SIPs aligned to system productivity and workforce goals

Looking Ahead

The progress achieved in 2025 marked a transformational year for nursing at SSM Health. Through Embedded Deployment, standardized operational expectations, an engaged Nursing Collaborative, and disciplined Sustainable Improvement Plans, nursing established a strong foundation for consistency, accountability, and continuous improvement.



Age-Friendly Measures

In late 2024, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) introduced new **Age-Friendly Hospital Structural Quality Measures** within the Hospital Inpatient Quality Reporting (IQR) Program, marking a significant national shift toward standardized, evidence based care for adults aged 65 and older. These measures are designed to accelerate adoption of age-friendly care practices across all hospital settings, including inpatient units, emergency departments, and procedural areas, beginning with the 2025 reporting year (CMS, 2024; Adler Milstein et al., 2025).

At SSM Health, nursing and clinical leaders embraced this national imperative, recognizing that older adults represent a growing and increasingly complex patient population. Nationally, adults age 65 and older account for more than 40% of hospital admissions and experience higher rates of delirium, falls, medication related harm, and functional decline during hospitalization (Drago & De Lima, 2025; Elias & Thompson, 2025).

The Journey to Age-Friendly Healthcare

The CMS Age-Friendly Hospital Measure requires hospitals to attest to **organizational structures and processes across five domains**, reflecting the widely adopted **4Ms Framework** developed by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement (IHI):

- Healthcare Goals
- Medication Management
- Frailty Screening and Intervention
- Social Vulnerability
- Age-Friendly Care Leadership

This structure intentionally aligns with national age-friendly recognition programs, including IHI Age-Friendly Health Systems, Geriatric Emergency Department Accreditation, and Geriatric Surgery Verification programs (Adler Milstein et al., 2025).

In the fall of 2024, each SSM Health Ministry completed a comprehensive gap analysis of the CMS Age-Friendly measures against our current state structures and processes.

At baseline, SSM Health met **10 of the 18 structural requirements**, positioning the organization competitively alongside early adopting health systems nationally, where partial implementation of the 4Ms remains common during early attestation years (CMS, 2024; Medisolv, 2025). This assessment allowed nursing leadership to identify high impact priorities for 2025 and focus improvement efforts where they would most benefit older adult patients.

SSM Health Nurses Leading the Way

Our approach reflects a core belief shared by national experts: **nursing leadership and frontline engagement are essential to successful age-friendly care delivery**. By grounding work in evidence, engaging those closest to the patient, and aligning with CMS quality structures, nursing continues to play a central role in advancing safer, more dignified care for older adults across the system (AHA, 2024; CMS, 2024).

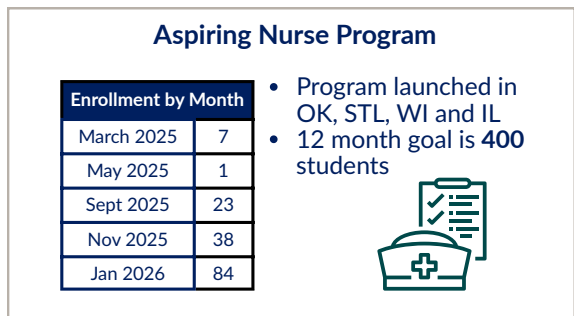
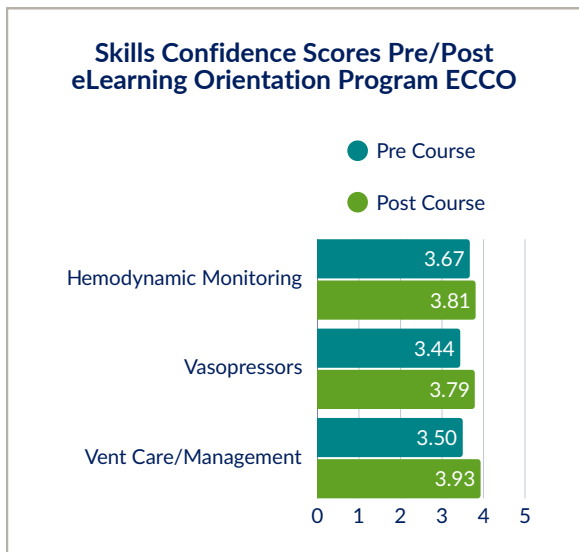
As CMS moves toward increased public transparency and future accountability in age-friendly care, SSM Health is well-positioned to continue progressing toward full compliance while delivering care that aligns with what matters most to older adults.

Implementation in Action

- Created an Age-friendly dashboard and added it to the EHR
- Added a new question to the Qualtrics Patient Experience survey
 - “The members of my healthcare team focused on what matters most to me.”
- Reactive review of PIMs (Potentially Inappropriate Medication) on home medication list and/or prescribed while in the hospital
- Proactive alert when PIM is being prescribed with decision support for more appropriate medication choices
- Evidence-based Practice review identified system mobility screening tool BMAT 2.0 for early 2026 implementation
- Identified a social isolation screening tool and incorporated it into routine screening
- Incorporated the Elder Abuse screening tool (EASI) into routine screening
- Collaborated with Quality & Safety to develop stratified quality data reports; review incorporated into the QAPI (Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement) for routine review
- Developed quarterly age-friendly education series.
- Introduced Nursing Mobility KPI goal for 2026
 - 85% of patients with a BMAT 2.0 level 2-4 will be mobilized 3 or more times a day
- Partnered with Care Transformation to include discussion of What Matters Most and Mobility in Multidisciplinary Rounds (MDRs)



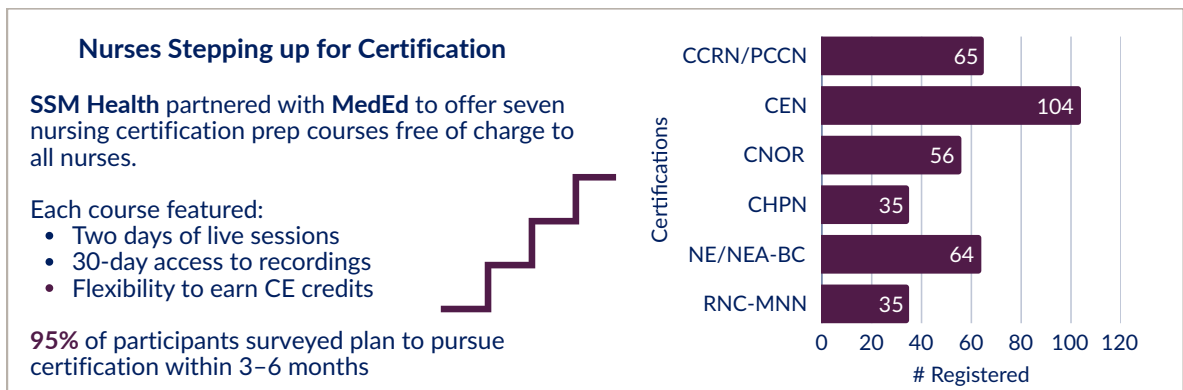
Clinical Education: Building Confidence, Capability, and Future Nurses



Patient Experience

Clinical Educators provided in-person, quarterly education in 260+ acute care nursing departments with the following outcomes:

- 2.26% increase in HCAHPS Nurse Communication scores from 77.29% (Q1) to 79.55% (Q2-Q4)
- Demonstrated intentional communication enhances patient trust and experience and drives measurable outcomes



Reach for the Stars (RFTS) Scholarship

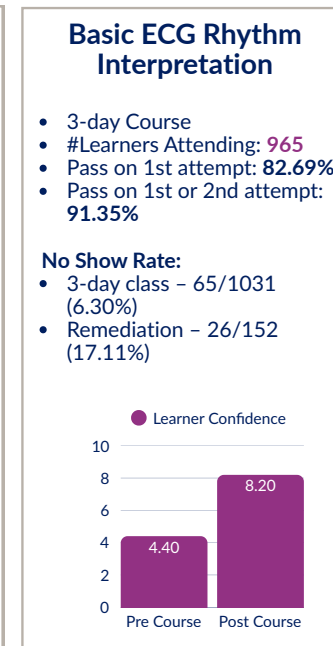
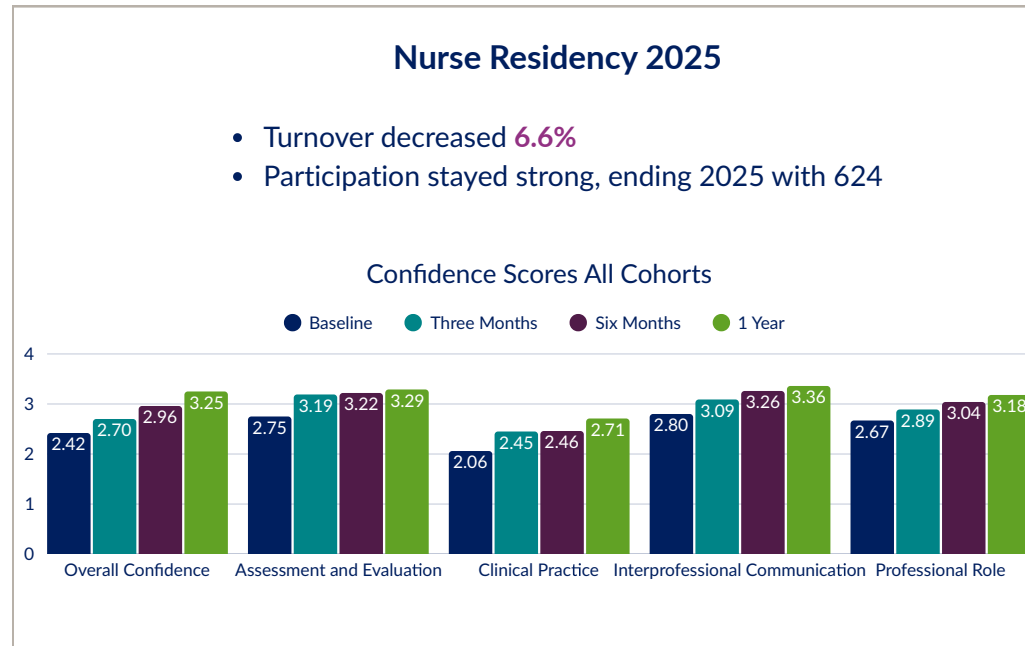
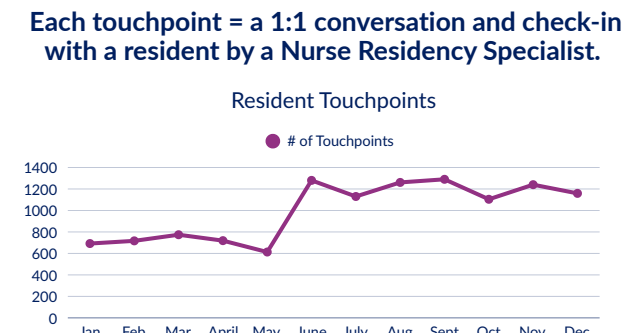
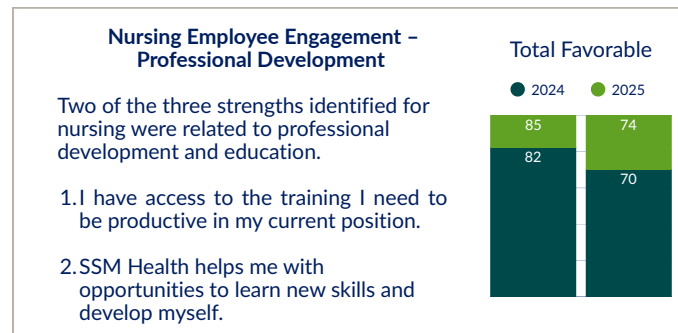
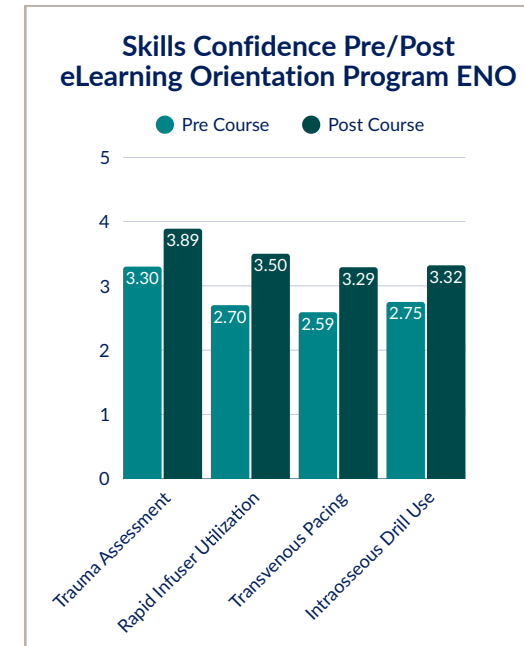
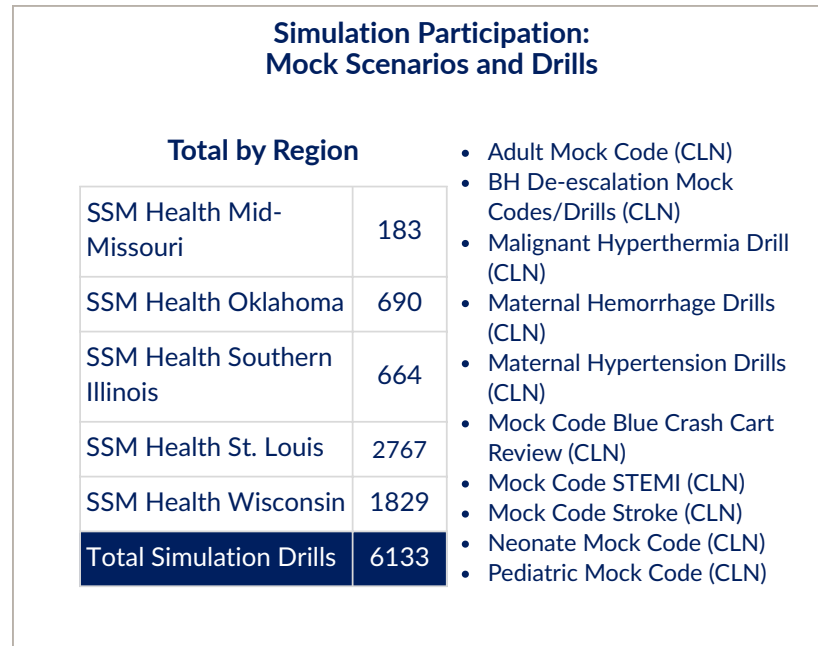
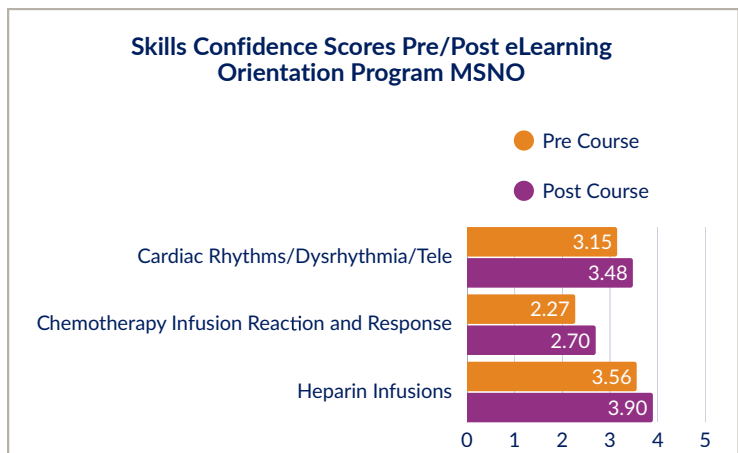
Launched in Wisconsin in 2025:

- Most scholarships ever awarded in an initial launch according to RFTS Foundation

Scholarships awarded to date:

- OK 57
- MidMo 3
- Wisconsin 14

Total scholars graduated - 24
92% retention rate



Experts in Action

Evidence-Based Practice Fellowship Program

Research and evidence-based practice are integral to our Mission and professional practice at SSM Health. The Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) Fellowship is a year-long training and mentorship program. Fellows learn to systematically evaluate and implement evidence in their practice. Upon completion of the program, graduates are eligible to apply for the EBP-CH credential.

The 2025 cohort completed 18 EBP initiatives from hospitals and outpatient facilities across the system. Throughout the year, we implemented OVID Synthesis, a platform that streamlines the literature process and supports dissemination.

Congratulations to the following fellows who completed the 2025 EBP Fellowship Program!

Ashley Navarro, RN-Charge Nurse, Behavioral Health
SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital - Madison

Kathryn Miller, Clinical Nurse Specialist
SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital - Madison

Charity Leister, RN-Program Coordinator
SSM Health St. Clare Hospital - Baraboo

Kim Boyd, RN-Care Coordinator Lead
SSM Health Bridgeton McKelvey

Chris Schattschneider, Athletic Trainer Lead
SSM Health Ripon Medical Center

Cindy Woods, RN-Administrative Supervisor
SSM Health St. Joseph Hospital - Lake Saint Louis

Kristen Gonzalez Pomeroy, TBD

Denise Mitton, Clinical Nurse Specialist
SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital - Madison

Kris Hanson, RN-Clinical Educator
SSM Health Dean Medical Group

Dyana Tillinger, RN-Administrative Supervisor
SSM Health St. Clare Hospital - Baraboo

Malinda Figueroa, RN-Stepdown/Critical Care
SSM Health St. Anthony Hospital - Shawnee

Jamie Gavinski, RN-Program Coordinator
SSM Health St. Clare Hospital - Baraboo

Nancy Patrick, Clinical Nurse Specialist
SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital - Madison

Jennifer Slaughter, Manager-Pharmacy Ambulatory
SSM Health Dean Medical Group Madison NHP

Nicole Dash, RN-Administrative Supervisor
SSM Health Ripon Medical Center

Rebecca Dosenbach, RN-Program Manager
Remote

Victoria Faulkner, RN-Nurse Residency Specialist
SSM Health DePaul Hospital - St. Louis

Theresa Kyriakopoulos, RN-Clinical Informaticist Senior
SSM Health Dean Medical Group Stoughton

Brittany Sponable, RN-Nurse Residency Specialist
SSM Health St. Mary's Hospital - St. Louis

Julie Scovronski, RN-Clinical Educator
SSM Health St. Joseph Hospital - St. Charles

Conference Presenters

Members of our nursing team presented at professional conferences, sharing insights, innovations, and best practices with peers across the field. Their presentations reflect a strong commitment to professional growth, collaboration, and advancing excellence in patient care.

Thank you to the following nurses for their courage to present new ideas, keen eye for opportunity, and for representing SSM Health on a national scale.

2025 Wound Care Conference
Presenter: Karen Slegesky (2024 EBP Fellowship)

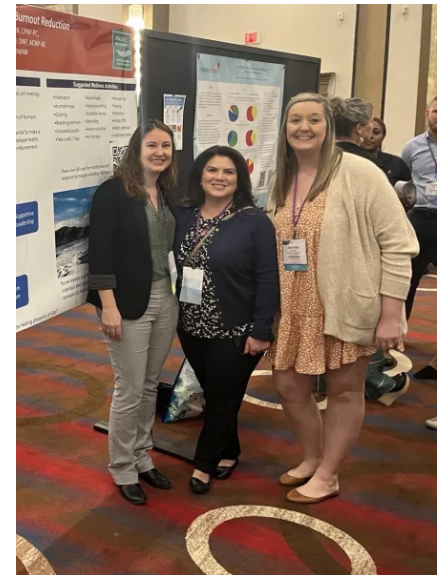
2025 Madison Nursing Symposium
Presenters: Nancy Patrick and Mollie Burr (2024 EBP Fellowship)

2025 ANPD Conference
Presenters: Jeana Nordike, Jaimie Talir, Anna Bauer-Baxter, and Jennifer Hayden

2025 ANIA Conference
Presenters: Brooke Mielkie and Kelly Weary

2025 PNEG Conference
Presenter: Pat (Mary) Logan (2024 EBP Fellowship)
Presenter: Julie Scovronski (2024 EBP Fellowship)

AORN Global Conference and Expo
Presenters: Mel Thompson and Kellie Schmidt
Education Presenters: Farrah Barnes and Missy DeVore



Publications

Our nursing team continues to be a powerful driver of innovation, quality, and thought leadership across our organization and the broader healthcare community. This year's published work reflects the depth of their clinical expertise, their commitment to evidence-based practice, and their dedication to improving patient outcomes through inquiry and shared learning.

These achievements highlight our belief that nursing excellence extends beyond the bedside and into the generation and dissemination of knowledge that shapes the future of healthcare.

We are proud to recognize and celebrate the contributions of our nursing colleagues, whose intellectual curiosity and professional leadership continue to elevate our organization's impact, reputation, and Mission.

Cantlin, D., Pascale, A., Fritz, E., Halm, M., Luther, B., & Warshawsky, N. (2025). Exploring Trends in the Ambulatory Nursing Practice Environment and Nurses' Career Intentions: 2021 to 2023. *Nursing Management*, 56(8), 26-34. <https://doi.org/10.1097/nmg.000000000000289>

Contributor to American Academy of Ambulatory Care Nursing (2025). *Ambulatory care nurse-sensitive indicator industry report: Meaningful measurement of nursing in the ambulatory patient care environment, 2nd ed.* <https://go.aaacn.org/s/#/store/browse/detail/a1BPW00002VJur2AG>

Fritz, E. & Curto, L. (2025). Transition from clinical to educator roles in nursing, six years later: A systematic integrative review. *Journal for Nurses in Professional Development*, 41(4), 209-213. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NND.0000000000001130>

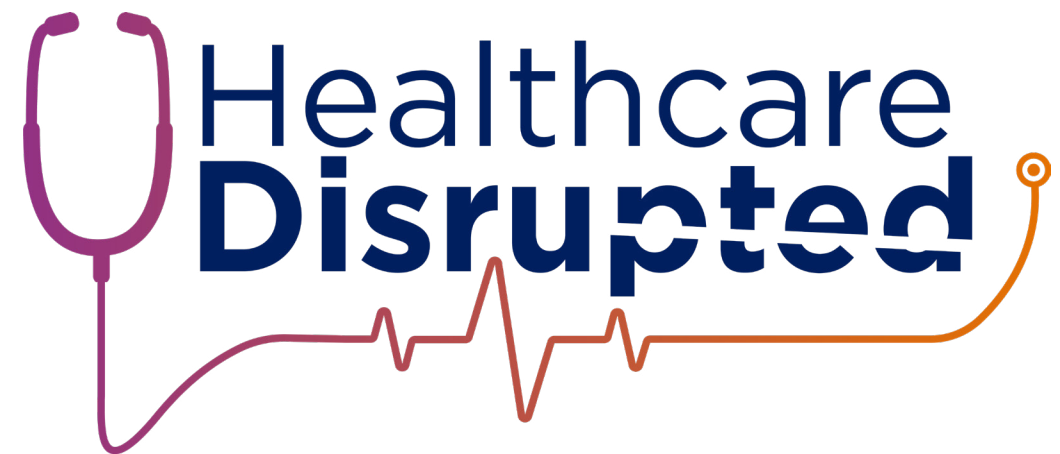
Fritz, E., Harper, M., Maloney, P., & MacDonald, R. (2025). Nursing professional development in ambulatory care settings: A descriptive study. *Journal of Ambulatory Care Nursing*, 1(3), 87-116. <https://doi.org/10.71178/JACN.2025.1.3.87>

Fritz, E. & Roehrig Wagner, J. (2025). Revitalizing and sustain a system-wide competency model. *Journal for Nurses in Professional Development*, 40(5), 262 - 265. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NND.0000000000001072>

Fritz, E., Weiler, S., Wood, A., Miller, K., & Kenkel, J. (2026). Promoting professional growth and retention through a system-wide interprofessional clinical ladder program. *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 56(4), 181-185. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NNA.0000000000001708>

Flynn, R., Brez, J., & Fritz, E. (2025). Standardizing orientation checklists: A quality improvement initiative. *Journal for Nurses in Professional Development*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1097/NND.0000000000001196>

Varghese, J., Halm, M. A., Shear, K., Heo, N. L., Mertens, K., Fritz, E., Hurlbut, J., Moss, E., & Hutti, M. (2025). Ambulatory care nursing research priorities: A national AAACN study. *Journal of Ambulatory Care Nursing*, 1(4), 125-146. <https://doi.org/10.71178/JACN.2025.1.4.125>



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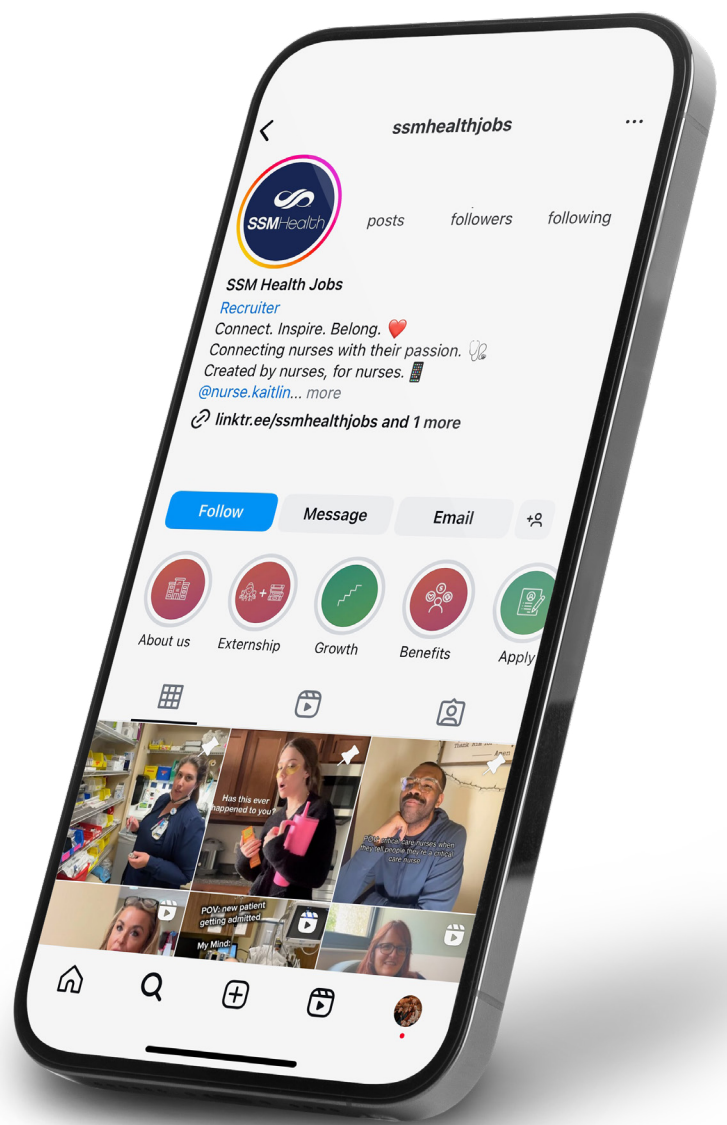
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