

Boosting RN Buy-in for Care Innovation: A **Communications Toolkit** for Nursing Leaders

Tools to help nursing leaders effectively communicate and build frontline RN buy-in for care transformation and new initiatives

Introduction

Nursing Catalyst's 2024 survey and focus group research reveal a significant disconnect between executive priorities and frontline RN perspectives on care delivery innovation. While health systems are focused on solutions like AI and virtual nursing to address workforce challenges, many RNs remain skeptical that these tools might increase workload and pressure at the bedside.

Nursing Catalyst findings highlighted several key insights that informed the production of this toolkit. There is a growing disconnect between leadership's investment in technology and innovation and frontline staffing-first priorities. RNs aren't resistant to innovation, but the frontline does not see how new tools address their pressing concerns. Frontline trust in their organization is not necessarily low because of disagreement, but because of limited access to the right information. When nurses are exposed to clear, data-driven messaging, especially messages that reflect their lived experience, their sentiments begin to shift. RNs overwhelmingly prefer to hear from leaders they know and trust, such as CNEs and nurse managers, and value regular, consistent information sharing through channels such as one-on-one check-ins or town halls.

Based on the research findings, this toolkit equips the nursing leadership bench with templates, talking points, scripting, and facilitation guides to support effective top-down communications with the frontline on safe staffing and care transformation. Built on survey and focus group data, the tools in this document were created to help leaders address common concerns, build trust, and drive alignment on key workforce and technology initiatives.

Looking for More Data?

Explore Nursing Catalyst's full data report out, including national frontline RN survey results and message testing insights here: [Data Primer: Insights to Strengthen Nurse Leader Communications](#). To dive deeper, explore our suite of complementary resources that further contextualize the frontline RN workforce. Each piece offers a focused lens on key factors shaping nurse sentiment, communication preferences, and response to change:

- [Rebuilding Frontline Nurse Confidence by Addressing the Gap in Safe Staffing Perceptions](#)
- [Nurse-Driven Insights: Understanding Frontline Nurses' Information Preferences](#)
- [Generational Perspectives on Care Transformation and Safe Staffing Among Frontline Nurses](#)
- [Virtual Nursing: Bridging the Gap between Leadership and Frontline Nurses Perceptions](#)

Together, these insights help nursing leaders tailor strategies that resonate across role types, generations, and attitudes toward innovation.

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Toolkit Overview & Executive Summary

Strong Top-Down Communication Drives Engagement, Buy-In, Trust



Communicating with frontline RNs about the future of care delivery is essential to the success of any innovation effort. Our survey data confirms this: RNs are seeking more direct, transparent updates from leadership as they navigate staffing challenges, rising acuity, and a wave of new care models and technologies. But it's not just about saying something; it's about getting the message exactly right. This toolkit was created to do just that. We tested messages with frontline RNs to understand what builds trust, clarity, and confidence.

Communication Tools to Support the Nursing Leadership Bench



Inside this toolkit, nurse leaders will find research-backed talking points, quick tips, and communication guidance designed to support meaningful engagement with staff. We've built these resources and included suggested messaging and other tips based on where frontline RNs report information gaps and what channels and messages are the most compelling. Whether you're leading a town hall, rounding on units, or talking directly to the frontline, this toolkit is here to help make those discussions clearer, more confident, and more impactful.

Getting Started: Using This Toolkit Your Way



This toolkit is not meant to be read front to back. Instead, flip through, skip around, and use what resonates most with your current challenges and goals. The toolkit is designed to be flexible, so leaders can use it to meet their teams where they are.

We recommend adapting the tools in this document to suit your organization's most pressing priorities, such as upcoming technology roll outs or unique staffing challenges.

Anticipating Frontline Questions & Concerns

A readiness checklist for
Chief Nurse Executives
before rollout

New Tech Rollout Frontline RN FAQs for Nursing Leaders



Background

New technology roll outs naturally come with fear and concerns from frontline RNs. Common concerns around AI and virtual nursing implementation often revolve around workflows changing, increased workload, accountability and licensing, and risks associated with patient care. If left unaddressed, these fears can fuel resistance, misinformation, and morale issues.

Executive nursing leadership plays a critical role in addressing these questions early. When leaders proactively engage from the top down, it helps minimize resistance by getting ahead of potential fears before they take root.

What This Tool Helps Chief Nurse Executives Achieve

By preemptively addressing frontline concerns, this tool supports chief nurse executives in leading technology innovation. It enables leaders to step into conversations early, before fears turn into resistance, and foster open, two-way dialogue that reinforces trust. This proactive approach supports smoother technology adoption and signals to nurses that their perspectives and concerns are central to the process. In doing so, leaders can reduce uncertainty, strengthen team connection, and foster the environment needed for successful and sustainable innovation.



What's inside? FAQs from frontline RNs on the implications of new technologies on their units

Recommended audience: CNEs and CNOs

When to use: Recommended for use when introducing new technologies or care models to frontline RNs

Time to read: 5 minutes

Frequently Asked RN Questions—A Checklist for Nursing Leaders Preparing to Roll Out New Technologies

Use this checklist to get ahead of questions frontline RNs are likely to ask when new technologies or care models are introduced. These questions reflect the most common concerns self-reported by frontline RNs—workload, patient care, and autonomy. Preparing thoughtful and transparent responses to these will support nurse leaders in building RN trust and gaining buy-in.

- ☐ Will this technology increase my workload?
- ☐ Could this technology replace nurses at the bedside?
- ☐ How will AI and virtual nursing change our ratios?
- ☐ Am I accountable if the technology makes a mistake?
- ☐ Is this going to make my job more complicated?
- ☐ How long will it take to learn this technology?
- ☐ Can this technology negatively impact patient care?
- ☐ How will this change everyday workflows?
- ☐ What do I say to patients when they ask me about this technology?
- ☐ How is this going to improve my day-to-day?
- ☐ Will nurses have input in shaping how this technology is used?

Communicating Leadership Vision & Visibility

Talking points for Chief
Nurse Executives and
Chief Nursing Offices

Executive Talking Points on Staffing & Care Transformation



Background

Executive nursing leaders set the tone for how new initiatives are perceived across the system. To build trust and alignment, CNEs must lead with purpose and clarity, helping staff understand why change is happening and what it means for them.

CNEs play a unique role: having the trust and authority to connect system strategy to what matters most to frontline RNs—safe staffing, patient care, and professional well-being. CNEs are best positioned to explain the “why,” share how the organization is investing in care transformation, and make those priorities feel real at the bedside. RNs consistently voice a desire to hear directly from nursing leadership. Whether it’s speaking at a forum or sharing a short video, visibility matters. When leaders communicate clearly and show up with purpose, it builds trust, reduces anxiety, and strengthens RN buy-in.

What This Tool Helps Chief Nurse Executives Achieve

The talking points on the following pages are designed to help system-level nursing leaders lead productive conversations around safe staffing, care transformation, and the adoption of new technologies with clarity and credibility. The talking points are grounded in Nursing Catalyst’s frontline RN sentiment survey data and reflect the self-reported priorities and concerns of frontline RNs across the country.

We recommend tailoring these talking points based on your organization’s culture, priorities, and audience. The goal is not to script or standardize leadership language, but to anchor communication in what we know builds trust, fosters transparency, and supports the successful adoption of system-wide changes and innovation.



What’s inside? Scripted talking points to help set the tone with frontline RNs around care innovation strategies

Recommended audience: CNEs and CNOs

When to use: Recommended for use when presenting strategic priorities and new technology roll outs to frontline RNs and nurse managers

Time to read: 10 minutes

Key Talking Points for Chief Nursing Executives

Purpose: Explain the Intent Behind Innovation

Improving patient care quality and access is the end goal.

Every decision we make is grounded in better patient care by supporting faster, safer and more consistent experiences for both patients and staff.

- “Early pilots show improved patient throughput and RN satisfaction when virtual nurses are embedded as part of the care team.”
- “These technologies are being introduced to enhance patient safety and support clinical decision-making, not replace nursing judgment.”
- “We are actively tracking patient safety, quality and experience metrics to ensure these innovations are improving care – not just changing how it’s delivered

Language Tip: Talking About Throughput



When referencing improved throughput, frame it in terms of improving access and service. RNs may interpret throughput as pushing patients out the door.

Try: “Helping patients move more smoothly through their care journey”

We are using technology to reduce workload and restore time for patient care

Nurses told us: workload is unsustainable. We heard that clearly. Our goal is to remove administrative drag, so your time and energy are spent where it matters most—at the bedside.

- “We’re not implementing AI for the sake of technology—it’s to give nurses more time with patients.”
- “Think of virtual nursing as an additional layer of support, not a substitute for in-person care.”
- “Think of it as a tool to complete the tasks that we know you want less of – auto-filling documentation, patient education, or flagging clinical risks in order to give you more time to connect with patients.”

Key Talking Points for Chief Nursing Executives

Purpose: Acknowledge the Reality of Today's Care Delivery Challenges

We want to give you more support at the bedside; technology helps fill that gap.

Staffing challenges are real. These innovations are part of a broader strategy to reduce pressure on bedside teams, while we continue to recruit, retain, and advocate for more hands at the bedside.

- “This is not about fewer nurses—it’s about more support for the nurses we have.”
- “We’ve heard loud and clear: nurses want more hands, more help, more time. While technology doesn’t replace people, it can help reduce the burden until more support is in place.”
- “AI and virtual nursing are ways to extend capacity—taking on non-physical tasks so bedside RNs aren’t carrying the entire load alone.”



A major concern for RNs is the fear that innovation will lead to increased patient ratios. If your organization is not changing ratios, say that clearly.

Technology is part of our strategy to reduce burnout and protect nurse wellbeing.

Innovation is not the solution to burnout, but it’s a meaningful step. We’re pairing innovation with investments in staffing, professional growth, and mental health to build a better future for nursing.

- “This isn’t about asking you to do more with less—it’s about helping you do your job with more support.”
- “We know burnout is driven by chronic overload, not just hard days. That’s why we’re using technology to take non-clinical tasks off your plate—so your focus can stay on patient care.”
- “Virtual nursing and AI are tools to give nurses breathing room—to restore time, reduce stress, and prevent the kind of overload that leads to burnout.”

Key Talking Points for Chief Nursing Executives

Purpose: Communicate that Change is Guided by RN Feedback

We are committed to learning what works and adjusting based on feedback

This is not a one-size-fits-all rollout. We will monitor what works, share results and continue to learn from you at every step.

- “Technology is meant to streamline workflows, not create extra steps—we will test and adjust based on your feedback.”
- “We’ll measure the impact of AI on workload and safety—and we’ll adjust if it’s not delivering.”

Purpose: Reinforce that Safe Staffing is the Goal

Technology is being introduced to support safe staffing, not reduce it

Our commitment is to maintain safe staffing and protect the bedside. Innovation is one way we ensure teams have the right support to focus on care.

- “We are investing in you; technology is a tool not a staffing solution.”
- “Virtual nurses won’t replace bedside RNs – they support them by offloading non-physical tasks”
- “We are investing in YOU—technology is a tool, not a staffing solution.”



Quick Tips for Leveraging Talking Points Effectively

Make it your own: Adapt the language to fit your natural voice and leadership style. The messages resonate when it’s coming from your authentic voice.

Localize the message: Reference your system’s specific initiatives, pilot programs or outcomes whenever possible. Frontline RNs want to hear what’s happening here.

Stay visible: Whether rounding or, speaking at a town hall or forum your presence matters. CNEs are uniquely positioned to share what’s happening in the market, the organization’s investments, and communicating the philosophy behind care transformation in a way that aligns with what RNs value most.

Source: THMA research and analysis.

Aligning with Your Nurse Managers

Scripting for nurse manager interactions with frontline RNs

Scripting for Nurse Managers: Navigating Frontline Concerns



Background

Nurse managers are a highly valued source of information for frontline RNs. As AI and virtual nursing solutions become more common, **64% of RNs report wanting staffing and care model updates directly from their manager**. Nurse managers serve as a critical link between leadership and the frontline, making them essential in communicating organizational changes.

Frontline RNs may be hesitant to directly express fears around technology integration to executive leadership. This makes nurse managers uniquely suited to address resistance and concerns as the frontline's closest point of leadership. Nurse managers must be prepared not only to reinforce what CNEs have communicated but also to answer difficult questions and address doubts in real time. Doing so harbors an environment of honest and supportive conversation that helps bridge the gap between leadership intent and frontline experience.

What This Tool Helps Nurse Managers Achieve

This tool equips nurse managers with research-backed messaging to address frontline concerns about new technology integration. By offering real-world examples, highlighting benefits to nurses, and demonstrating positive impacts on patient care, it enables managers to confidently communicate with their frontline.

These scripted talking points and responses will equip nurse managers to respond with confidence, leading to established trust and shifted mindsets.



What is inside? Scripted talking points that directly respond to common frontline concerns regarding AI and VRN integration

Recommended audience: Nurse managers; frontline leaders

When to use: Recommended to reference toolkit when frontline RNs voice concerns about AI and VRN

Time to read: 10 minutes

Talking Points for Nurse Managers

“AI and Virtual Nursing are going to replace RNs.”

Bedside RNs will always be essential at the point of care. Virtual nursing and AI are about lightening your load, not replacing your clinical presence.

- I understand why you might feel this way--new technology brings uncertainty. What we've seen is that virtual nurses and AI are able to take on tasks like admissions and discharges, which frees up time for bedside RNs to focus on patient care.
- The real goal behind introducing technologies like these is to ease some of the pressures you face each day, that way you can spend more time on tasks that require your skill and attention.

“Patients do not want automated responses or screens; they look for human connection when receiving care.”

Of course, human connection is what our patients need. This helps protect our ability to be present in times when it matters most.

- Ensuring patient experience is at the heart of these efforts. Virtual nurses and AI will handle routine work, so bedside nurses spend less time on administrative tasks and more time building trust and connection with patients during critical moments.
- The human side of care is irreplaceable— patients need nurses present and at their side. The goal isn't for this technology to connect with patients, that is your role. By taking routine, time-consuming tasks off your plate, these tools will allow you the bandwidth to be present and engage with every patient.

Talking Points for Nurse Managers

“These technologies will eliminate critical thinking and nurse’ clinical judgement.”

You’ll always make the decisions; these are tools that will support you in making them easier and faster.

- That is a valid concern, a nurse’s judgement is crucial to safe patient care delivery. AI is not here to replace your critical thinking; it supports it by providing quick access to information and data, allowing you to make well-informed decisions much quicker.
- These tools are designed to support predictable and repetitive work, leaving the complex decisions to nurses to use their expert judgement. As nurses, you will remain the decision-maker. AI simplifies the process, enabling you to think critically and use clinical reasoning.

“AI and VRN will lower the standard of care, putting our patients at risk.”

Keeping patients safe comes first. These tools help us do that by making sure nothing slips through the cracks.

- Leadership shares your commitment to safe patient care. These solutions allow us to monitor patients when you can’t be at the bedside– catching early signs of issues and allowing you to intervene quickly.
- These technologies help us add another layer of protection, not remove it. Data shows these tools help prevent missed care opportunities and improve response time. They’re able to constantly monitor your patients and catch things beyond the human eye, ultimately raising, not lowering the standard of care.

Talking Points for Nurse Managers

“This is just a way to justify increasing our ratios.”

That is a valid concern. But our focus is on your workload, to make it more manageable, not to add more patients.

- I understand why this may be a concern—protecting safe staffing is a priority. The purpose of this technology is to help redistribute your workload. It is not our intention to reduce the number of RNs at the bedside.
- That is a very real concern and one that we take seriously. The intent is to make workloads more sustainable and manageable, not to increase your patient load. Data shows that by leveraging virtual nurses and AI, bedside RNs can focus more on direct patient care—relieving you of administrative tasks and allowing for ratios that feel reasonable.



Important: Only share this if it is accurate. If ratios are changing, be transparent and address it directly to avoid confusion or mistrust.



Quick Tips for Productive Conversations

Use your own voice. These talking point serve as a guide, adapt them in a way that feels natural to you. Authenticity builds trust.

Be transparent and honest. You don't need to have all the answers. Say so and ensure to follow-up when you do.

Lead with empathy. Validating feeling helps make your staff more open to hearing your message.

Keep it simple. Sometimes simple is better. Avoid overwhelming your staff with too much technical detail.

Leveraging Peer Champions to Establish Trust, Credibility

A how-to guide for setting up and facilitating a peer-led champion information sharing session

How to Host a Peer-Led Innovation Champion Session



Background

42% of frontline RNs say they want to hear about safe staffing and care transformation initiatives from a trusted colleague or peer—making peer messengers a powerful, yet often underutilized, channel for building trust.

When colleagues who have firsthand experience with virtual nursing or AI share their stories, it reinforces leadership messaging in a way that feels authentic, relatable, and grounded in day-to-day reality. These peer-led conversations can strengthen buy-in from the bottom up, helping staff feel more confident, heard, and supported as they navigate change.

What This Tool Helps Nursing Leadership Achieve

This session offers nursing leadership a structured, peer-led approach to build trust around care transformation. By elevating the voices of frontline RNs who have firsthand experience with virtual nursing or AI, leaders can reinforce key messages in a way that feels credible and grounded in daily practice.

This tool provides:

- Step-by-step guidance on how to set up and run an Innovation Champion session
- A discussion guide with sample questions to facilitate meaningful conversation
- A 60-minute session format, including presentation time and staff Q&A



What is inside? Guidance on how to set up, run, and facilitate an Innovation Champion Session

Recommended audience: CNEs/CNOs

When to use: Recommended to reference toolkit at times when frontline RNs voice concerns about AI and VRN

Time to read: 10 minutes

Source: THMA research and analysis.

Innovation Champion Sharing Session

Goal: This session is designed to give innovation champions a platform to speak directly with their peers about new technologies and care model changes. Frontline RNs say they want to hear about these technologies from colleagues they trust—this session helps make that possible.

Timing:

- ☐ Set up: 5 minutes
 - ☐ Speaker presentation & guiding questions: 40 minutes
 - ☐ Wrap up: 5 minutes
 - ☐ Staff Q&A session: 10 minutes
- Total time:**
60 minutes

How to Use the Facilitation Guide:

- I. Select a speaker to discuss their experience using AI or Virtual Nursing tools.
 - The speaker should be an innovation champion— someone who is comfortable and has experience using new technologies (e.g., a dedicated acute care Virtual Nurse).
- II. Invite the speaker to a formal session to share their experiences with frontline RNs
 - Ask the speaker to talk about their experience using AI or Virtual Nursing tools in depth, using the guiding questions in the Facilitation Guide on the next page to help drive the conversation. The conversation can cover both positive and negative experiences and will include a Q&A session at the end to give your staff a chance to ask questions.
 - Explain that the goal is to help staff gain a better understanding of how nurses have successfully used AI or Virtual Nursing. The session is aimed to help assuage fears and address hesitancy regarding new tools.
 - If the speaker is not from your health system, ensure they have the correct logistical information for the session, including the location and any relevant information about AI or Virtual Nursing efforts currently underway
- III. Schedule the innovation champion presentation as a 60-minute staff meeting.
 - I. Use the Facilitation Guide (page 20 of this toolkit) to help guide the discussion

Source: THMA research and analysis.

Facilitation Guide

This guide will help you facilitate a session to ask innovation champions questions about their experience using and implementing various forms of innovative technology into care management.

▪ Set the Stage and Ask Questions

1. Introduce speaker, including role and title
2. Describe purpose of session: to help staff hear about an innovation champion's experience using [AI and/or Virtual Nursing].

▪ Ask speaker to present using guiding questions

1. What was your experience like using [AI and/or Virtual Nursing] generally?
2. Did you have any initial concerns when starting to use [AI and/or Virtual Nursing]?
 - a. If so, what were they? Were they dispelled?
3. With your initial experience using [AI and/or Virtual Nursing], what went well?
4. Did anything go wrong?
 - a. If so, what happened?
 - b. What did you do to solve any problems that arose?
5. How has using [AI and/or Virtual Nursing] changed your day-to-day?
6. Has using [AI and/or Virtual Nursing] impacted your workload?
 - a. If so, how?
7. Are there any tools or practices that helped you adjust to using [AI and/or Virtual Nursing]?
8. What surprised you most about your experience using [AI and/or Virtual Nursing]?
9. What do you wish others knew about [AI and/or Virtual Nursing]?

▪ Transition Conversation to Staff Q&A Session

▪ Thank the Speaker

Explain that the next part of the session is for your staff to reflect on the speaker's story



Quick Tip for Making the Most of Champion Sharing Sessions

Record the conversation or make the information available to your staff asynchronously.

Questions about this research or the Nursing Catalyst research collaborative? Please reach out to us directly to learn more.

Nursing Catalyst Research Team



Lauren Rewers
Research Senior Director
lrewers@hmacademy.com



Alexis Osei
Analyst



Alex Marrinan-Duke
Research Associate Director



Tess Albert
Analyst



Sara Zargham
Research Associate Director



Ritika Kini
Analyst

About Nursing Catalyst

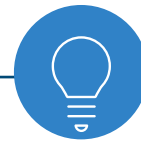
Nursing Catalyst is an innovation incubator helping leaders at all levels plan, pilot, and scale change across the nursing enterprise. There are two parts of the program: 1) the Nurse Manager Idea Labs, and 2) a Research-Backed Innovation Collaborative for CNEs and other nursing executives.

Nursing Catalyst, in Two Parts



Cross-System Nurse Manager Idea Labs

- 9-month innovation sprint for high-performing, high-potential nurse managers
- Participants select a “test of change” to pitch to leadership and pilot on their unit
- Peer and leadership virtual touchpoints along the way provide support, opportunities to share lessons learned



Research-Backed Innovation Collaborative

- Cross-system innovation incubator to support strategic decision-making on top challenges that need disruption and emerging solutions and technologies that will disrupt how the nursing enterprise operates
- Research, insights, and data to help action on innovation

Learn more about The Health Management Academy's Nursing Catalyst program today.

