

Rush University College of Nursing (RUCON) and CommunityHealth (CH) established an Academic-Practice Partnership (APP) in 2014. Since its inception, the RUCON-CH APP has grown and met the following AACN recommendations to: enhance clinical practice of academic nursing, create a partnership in the preparation of nurses of the future, provide an integration of academic nursing into population health initiatives and partner for optimal patient care and healthcare delivery. In alignment with the AACN-AONE Taskforce on Academic Practice Partnerships 2012 guiding principles, the RUCON-CH APP has demonstrated an innovative, sustained and evolving relationship that goes beyond clinical placements and has demonstrated measurable positive outcomes.

Established in 1993, CH is the largest volunteer-based health center in the nation. The mission is to serve people without essential healthcare. This is accomplished through the provision of primary and specialty care, medications, lab testing, mental health services and health education at no charge to low-income, uninsured adults in the Chicagoland area. With over 1000 volunteers, CH serves as a primary care provider to 4000 patients annually, providing services six days per week. CH has been an established site for multiple clinical training programs including regional medical schools, medical residencies and clinical pharmacy training. Through the creation of the APP with the RUCON, training programs have expanded to include clinical DNP/NP students, initially training 3 NP students per year to now training 6-9 NP students per year. CH has served as a site for DNP quality improvement projects hosting 3 projects each cycle and working to align student-project to student-project for improved continuity and growth. In addition, the CH Director of Clinical Services/Nurse Practitioner serves as mentor to both clinical and quality improvement project students. Lastly, with the clinical support of the embedded faculty, CH was able to achieve Patient-Center Medical Home designation.

The RUCON mission is to integrate nursing practice, scholarship, and education throughout diverse communities and to boldly lead health care transformation to ensure health equity across the continuum of care. Consistently ranked as a top nursing program, the RUCON offers degrees from the master's through the doctoral levels. In addition, the RUCON history of forward-thinking, including Luther Christman's Rush Model of Nursing, has supported innovative partnerships. The APP was initially established within the DNP/FNP program, currently ranked number 4 in the nation. In 2014, as part of the Graduate Nursing Education (GNE) Demonstration grant, the RUCON embedded a DNP/FNP faculty member into clinical practice at CH. The RUCON faculty member continues in this role, serving as a continuity provider of comprehensive primary care 16 hours per week, as a member on the CH Clinical Advisory Council, and as clinic support when the Director of Clinical Services is away. Throughout her tenure, the RUCON faculty member has provided clinical training for over 20 DNP/NP students. In addition, the APP provided a site for over 10 DNP quality improvement projects. At the end of the GNE grant cycle, the APP was placed within the RUCON Office of Faculty Practice. The RUCON Office of Faculty Practice is home to over 20 APPs. This integrated department matches expert faculty and nursing students with community partners. The APP move to the RUCON Office of Faculty Practice established a commitment to the APP. With this commitment, there has been further expansion of the APP to include additional RUCON academic programs as well as the establishment of a faculty practice RN role at CH. Lastly, the embedded faculty has been able to develop curricular changes to target clinical reasoning skills based on the direct supervision of multiple students across eight years.

The RUCON-CH APP is an exemplar of a successful partnership. In the time since inception, we have increased patient access to care with 685 patient visits in 2021 alone, increased student training from 3 NP students per year to 6-9 students per year, improved quality metrics meeting and exceeding clinic goals, raised student awareness and competencies in the care of under-resourced populations leading to 7 students working in similar settings post-graduation and improved NP education through curricular changes. We look forward to what our continued APP can accomplish.