



The Evolution of Hoag's Nursing Clinical Ladder Program:
Introducing the New Online Platform

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Introduction

The Clinical Ladder Program (CLP) has long been a mainstay of hospitals across the country, used as a tool to help nurses advance their careers, pursue their professional goals and gain rewards for clinical excellence. The program is well-intentioned, however there are complications that have prevented some nurses from enrolling, which has hindered their advancement. We wanted to change this at Hoag.

As a nonprofit, faith-based health care system with a mission to provide the highest quality of care and services to the community, the best way to care for our patients is to support our staff by empowering their capabilities. As we strive for excellence, Hoag recognized an opportunity to redesign our CLP to assist nurses in achieving their goals. We wanted to highlight advancement through an innovative platform that simplified the Ladder experience, making it more accessible, automated and transparent.

Hoag's new innovative CLP is now a completely digital end-to-end solution. The new platform has a built-in electronic portfolio (e-portfolio) designed to streamline the application process. We have configured the platform to include custom workflows for Ladder Champions and nursing Leaders to approve applications, activities and innovation projects.

Ladder nurses can now easily collaborate with others as they advance, navigating their progress using a simple online interface. The new platform helps them track projects, manage committee meetings, communicate with leads, and send text message notifications. Now, it is more accessible and transparent for Ladder nurses and Champions to handle every aspect of the program, ensuring their career growth and deepening their capability to provide exceptional patient care. The technological advancements of Hoag's new CLP ensure success by putting the power of the program into the hands of those who drive it: our nurses.

Currently, Hoag is one of the first health care systems in the country to automate their entire CLP fully. Our goal was to create a complete digital ecosystem that offers a positive and engaging experience for our nurses, without diverting the focus from providing exceptional patient care. Join us in exploring the innovations of our newly reimagined CLP, and learn more about how our nurses are measuring their impact and creating shared value across the organization.

History of the Career Ladder

Hoag's CLP has been operational for more than 20 years. Previously, it was based on a cumbersome manual application and traditional tracking processes. The process often created logistical challenges on many different levels since it was time consuming for Ladder nurses, Champions, and Directors.

Without organizational visibility and transparency with program participants, committees and Champions, it was difficult to create a system of accountability. This left many administrators discouraged with the process and Ladder participants lacking the support to advance professionally. The previous analog format lacked the foundation to build scalable infrastructure and initiate growth. As a result, Ladder nurses were overwhelmed with tasks and applicants were unclear on how to participate. The application process was deemed complicated and intimidating, which ultimately dissuaded many nurses from joining the CLP.

One of the program's first major changes came in 2015 when we migrated from a point system for activities. Previously, participating nurses received points for pre-approved activities with a requirement to meet a designated point threshold to qualify for the next stage of the Ladder. The Ladder program

had 239 active nurses, so the time and effort to track and organize the point system was taking an excessive amount of time to maintain.

In 2016, we made the appropriate steps to simplify the Ladder experience. Nurses shared a tremendous amount of valuable feedback, which helped us to create a more efficient program. Thanks to the communication with our dedicated nursing Leaders and Ladder Champions, we learned more about what participants liked about the program, what they hoped could improve or change, and how we could create a more effective interface that would support participants to make greater strides in their jobs.

By 2017, it was evident a larger change was needed. It was important for the hospital to adopt modern technology, so we could continue innovating and creating growth opportunities for our Ladder nurses. Thus, the decision was made by nursing leadership to build a fully automated, paperless platform that would simplify the entire Ladder process.

Currently, Hoag's new Clinical Ladder features the ability to monitor and track progress for the nurses, nurse Leaders and Ladder Champions through virtual collaboration. The new format offers the convenience of mobility and portability. Participants can now maintain control and visibility into their projects, activities and committee meetings, effectively managing expectations through each stage of the program. They can also collaborate and communicate in real time with Ladder Champions and internal stakeholders who are leading initiatives as part of our value-based care strategy.

So how did this new Clinical Ladder program come to fruition?

Changing the Ladder for the Better

The core need driving the initiative to change Hoag's CLP came from the nurses themselves, with a desire to address productivity and logistical issues. Nurses at varying stages of the Ladder program shared feedback on how Hoag could improve the program by building on past strengths while creating new opportunities.

Nurses play a vital role in support of Hoag's mission to offer the highest quality of health care services to the communities we serve. It was imperative we partner with a highly collaborative and engaged nurse community to help pioneer an innovative program that best suited their needs.

We are incredibly inspired by how motivated and passionate our nurses are about advancing their careers. Due to their feedback and recommendations, we were able to build an easy-to-use tool that simplifies the Ladder experience by optimizing their time more efficiently. It is exciting to see how our nurses have embraced the new program and reignited their spirit for the Ladder program.

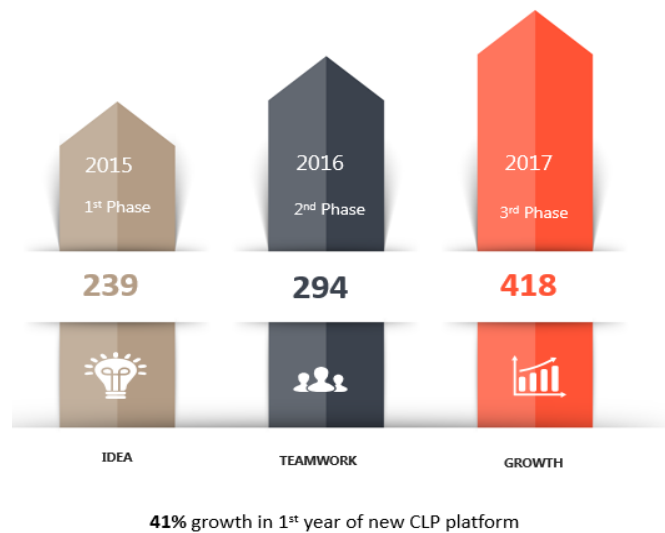
The Process of Changing the Ladder: Hoag's new Ladder program aims to advance our team of clinical nurses who are tenured, well-experienced and educated. We saw this as an opportunity to grow the Ladder program's structure while helping our nurses achieve milestones and requirements to advance in a more organic way, putting advancement opportunities more closely in reach.

One of the primary challenges our nurses shared was the need for program transparency. They requested more clarity on who is involved at each stage of the Ladder – and what they do. We

addressed concerns about the hierarchal structure and offered a more concise representation of the workflow. To become more efficient, it was important to create a paperless application that was easier to work with, including an e-portfolio designed to keep a record of a nurse's progress in one place. This would also help nurse Leaders and committees to network, collaborate, and find employees with the expertise they needed.

Hoag wanted to create a way to support our Preceptors, who work incredibly hard to train and acclimate our nurses and nursing students. We redesigned the new Ladder program for Preceptors to join the CLP and be incentivized for their effort and contributions. A portion of their required activity is subsidized by maintaining their Preceptor designation.

Where the Ladder is Today: Hoag's Career Ladder program was launched in the spring of 2017 after a swift three-month build out in partnership with StaffGarden. The program has been very well received, having grown 41% in the first year of use.



Instead of adopting a traditional CLP, we chose to pave the way as an industry leader and revamp our CLP platform to create a lasting and profound company-wide impact.

Goals of the New Ladder

The three-year plan is to have 50% of all eligible Hoag clinical nurses active in the Clinical Ladder Program. We can accomplish this by encouraging others to maximize the benefits of the new system. While that goal is certainly ambitious, we can achieve this plan by creating consistency and standardization, keeping the focus on professional elevation and improving patient care. We plan to do this by implementing the following key features.

Connectivity: Through various avenues, such as online check-ins, text message updates, and two-way communications, the current CLP platform highlights the importance of program consistency and work accountability. Now, there are more opportunities for engagement between Ladder nurses and Champions that can surpass busy schedules. Online prompts and text notifications help nurses stay focused, driven and organized. These assist the nurses in

staying up-to-date with nursing Champions and Leads. With this method, their goals are always in view.

Transparency: The new Ladder platform focuses on consistent reporting and organizational tools while gaining awareness of the metrics that govern the Ladder system. Participants can now see what other nurses are accomplishing – or need assistance with – in their Ladder journey. Online communication with Champions and Nursing Directors also supports them in meeting quarterly check-ins and seeing the results of those milestones in real time. Similarly, Champions can now track participants’ progress within their projects, how many committee meetings they have attended, and more.

Incentives: Nurses are financially incentivized as they advance through the Ladder program. A percentage raise in their compensation now meets them at every level, while goal-setting initiatives prompt participation and communication. In addition, we have the opportunity to highlight all the benefits of our tuition reimbursement and nursing scholarship programs, which helps our nurses advance to the next level of the Ladder program.

Recognition: Hoag plans to add recognition opportunities for advancements on the Ladder and support the completion of projects by using gamification features.

Benefits and Value: The new online platform was built to grow along with both the Ladder program and participating nurses. As more nurses join the Ladder, the platform’s evolution will allow for more recruitment opportunities, better participant retention, and more advanced developments.

New Clinical Ladder Program Features

The new platform now gives Hoag the ability to collect and monitor data on our CLP nurses to help them meet their career and professional development goals. While collaborating with StaffGarden on recreating the CLP, we used existing technology to build out applications that can help nurses succeed in advancing their career, stated Ryan Reid, Founder of StaffGarden. The new CLP now acts as a private clinical CV that includes a nurse’s license, education, and other information that creates an e-portfolio”. The e-portfolio can be searched by Champions and Leads who are searching for nurses who have the specific skill sets.

New features include:

System Enhancements: Automation grants participating nurses the freedom and control to oversee their Ladder projects through accessibility from their mobile phone or computer. Another benefit to having the work categorized through the new online program is the database presents that work front and center – and shows participants how far they are in the process. For example, the new database will display how one’s personal progress is 20% compared to others, which may be at 60%. Nurses can see what is happening in real-time.

Program Requirements: The requirements for Ladder applicants remain the same, but the method for managing those requirements has changed. The software determines which level applicants are eligible for. The previous version of the program required a threshold of points to qualify, but the new program tracks it and tells the participant what is needed.

The task of selecting supplemental activities has also changed. The list was constrained by the program organizers. Currently, when Ladder nurses look through activities, there are approximately 20 to choose from. It is much easier to see supplemental activities and the corresponding credits for easy selection.

Application Process: The application process is now effectively streamlined due to automation and easy access. In addition, participants can save their application, and resume working on it as needed. Applicants can also address every aspect of their approval online.

Communication is conducted online by a Champion or nurse leadership. When a decision is made, applicants are notified via e-mail. Depending on the status, the applicant can re-apply when eligible, or start advancing on the Ladder.

Getting Started: Nurses can customize their dashboard by selecting activities consisting of committee participation, supplemental activities and innovation projects. After meeting the necessary requirements, nurses can monitor their workload through the dashboard, which acts as a data center that shows progress, meetings schedules and more at a glance. Also, the dashboard encourages nurses to communicate to their unit about what they have learned in their committee meetings, creating transparency and dialogue that can help support their work. Users can also manage their progress reports from this page, and connect with leadership as needed.

The New Ladder Experience

The new Clinical Ladder platform can be customized according to individual needs, adapting with the nurse as he or she advances up the Ladder. There are uniform aspects across the entire Ladder program regardless of level.

Dashboard View (Example Only)

Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian

Peggy Olsen
 Manager / Director: Michael Krug
 Status: **Approved**

Progress: 47% Complete

Program: Hoag 2017-2018 Clinical Ladder
 Level: Clinical Nurse III
 Type: Renewal
 Applied: 4/2/2018
 Department: Sub-ICU

Last Update: 4/2/2018 12:17 PM
 Email: peggy.olsen@netquarry.com
 Mobile Number: (818) 216-7362
 Hired: 4/3/2011 - 7.0 years

Created: 4/2/2018 11:44 AM by Ryan Reid

Activity Requirements

- Involvement in a Hoag Committee/Council with 50% attendance by member (100% overall for unit). (In Progress) - My Status: In Progress - Manager / Director Status: **Approved**
 Blood Culture Contamination Reduct... **3 of 4 attended**
 Manager / Director Approval: *Great idea.*
- Department Director agreed upon Clinical Innovation. (In Progress) - My Status: In Progress - Manager / Director Status: **Approved**
 Proper education on appropriate use ...

Checkups

- Completed: 4/2/2018 12:05 PM
 Above Expectations (Peggy Olsen - owner)
 I got off to a slow start, but I'm finishing great.
 Above Expectations (Michael Krug - manager)
 Great job.
- Completed: 4/2/2018 12:05 PM
 Meets Expectations (Peggy Olsen - owner)
 Tough quarter, picked up extra shifts, but I'm still attending committee.
 Above Expectations (Michael Krug - manager)
 Good Job
- Completed: 4/2/2018 12:06 PM
 Above Expectations (Peggy Olsen - owner)
 I haven't done much yet, but my TRIP project is in planning stage.
 Above Expectations (Michael Krug - manager)
 Great Job!

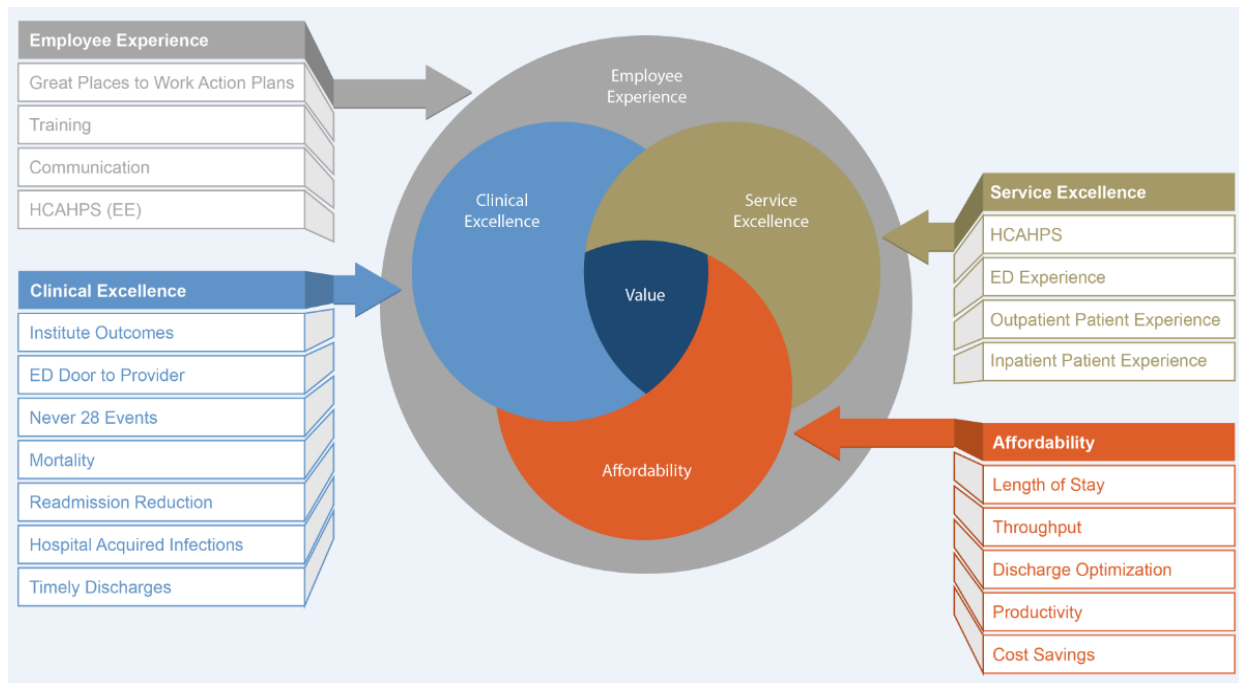
Your Dashboard: The dashboard features an overview of Ladder nurse projects, activities, and committees. Here, nurses can easily navigate to their e-portfolio to make changes and instantly see their schedule, whether it be a committee meeting or a project update with their Lead. Similarly, they can navigate further into the platform to make changes to each of these categories as necessary. For Champions and Nursing Directors, the new platform offers custom workflows, making it easier to approve Ladder applications, activities, meetings and innovation projects.

Creating your Online Clinical Ladder Portfolio: Nurses can create a built-in e-portfolio that acts as an online calling card to highlight their experience and achievements. Both the online application for the Ladder program and the portfolio are mandatory.

Using the Online Committee Meetings Scheduler: The online scheduler helps nurses regulate their committee meetings. Nurses need to use the online platform to find the meetings they are interested in attending and sign up for them. The platform also allows the organizer of the committee to check-in the attendees. This digital process replaces the previous paper sign-in sheet.

Using Text Messaging Updates: During the application process, Ladder nurses have the option to sign up for text message updates when they enter their contact information. The only texts Ladder nurses will receive are about committee meetings and reminders for meetings. Nurses are free to unsubscribe from text updates for meetings at any time.

How to Track Activities and Innovation Projects Through the Value Index: Nurses can use the Value Index to find the initiative they feel most connected to when choosing an innovation project. Calling upon the pillars of Clinical Excellence, Affordability, Service Excellence and Employee Experience, the Hoag Value Index helps each Ladder nurse select the project that best aligns with their objectives, as well as Hoag's overall goals to provide excellent and exceptional patient care. The innovation is a byproduct of the Value Index. While we have placed more rigor around project selection, our nurses still have an opportunity to select an initiative they want to work on that is mutually beneficial for them and our Value Index. Our nurses can select initiatives such as 'Great Places to Work,' and even leverage the Value Index to search for other nurses who are working on similar innovations with the opportunity to collaborate and support one another in their projects.



Value Index

Measuring Project Effectiveness Through Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Time-Bound (SMART) Goals: Nurses working on innovation projects can use the online platform to create SMART Goals, which helps to navigate their workload to meet important deadlines. SMART Goals help nurses create and meet their own milestones throughout every stage of their innovation project, ensuring completion in a timely fashion and delivery of the end results to management.

Peers Using the New Ladder

Hoag is very proud of all the arduous work that went into creating the automated Clinical Ladder platform. We are also thankful for all the nurses who participated by making their preferences known and suggesting improvements that could enrich their personal and professional lives. We are pleased to share some insights from two of our Ladder Champions who have used the new platform for the past year. Ladder Champion Camille Danculescu welcomed the change to the automated system. “The old system was tedious, outdated, and labor intensive to evaluate,” she shares, adding that not only is the new system easier and more efficient in helping to supervise her nurses, but it helps her support their career ambitions. “With the new system, I can check-in on their progress and identify areas they may need help with,” Danculescu explains.

Similarly, Ladder Champion Erin Boxley calls the new system “vastly better than the previous lack of any technological assistance.” Even though she does not necessarily find the new system to be intuitive, she feels that any issues she has with the new system can be solved with some exploration. She stated “Most things can be figured out. With more use – just puttering around, seeing what I can or can’t do – it becomes even easier.”

Like Danciulescu, Boxley also feels the new system helps her support her Ladder nurses in their work pursuits. “The new system provides a way to support nurses in real-time, and I am able to see who has turned in their updates and who has not,” Boxley shares. “It’s very quick and allows me to touch base with everyone digitally without having to pull them aside during a busy work day. I can support them without taking up valuable clinical time. It also allows me to speak to their interests and ideas as things occur, rather than a week later when I can see them.”

Both Boxley and Danciulescu agree that the new system makes it easier for them to oversee the nurses they currently supervise on the Ladder, though Danciulescu does find she encounters some challenges if she does not use the system regularly. “I find that if I do not use the system frequently, I have to relearn steps,” she explains. “Also, some of the ‘selectable’ items are defined as tabs, some as pencils, and some you have to scroll down to the bottom of the page to edit. This is confusing for the learner. I have frequently heard some selectable items referred to as ‘hidden’ from some staff.”

Nevertheless, the platform’s paperless automation has many advantages for our Champions. “It’s so much easier than the paper system – it saves time with typing alone,” Boxley says. “I love that the system can be accessed from home or phone. I can get the information right on my phone. I love getting reminder emails about meetings. Then I email my entire unit!” Adds Danciulescu, “I like that I don’t have to collect multiple documents to turn in at the end of the year.”

Plus, Boxley feels it helps her connect with her nurses due to real-time interaction capabilities, helping to strengthen the relationship she has with her nurses. “The system keeps all of us on the same page,” she notes. “It’s much easier to work together when everyone is looking at the same picture. This way, everyone has the same information.”

Danciulescu believes the new system helps to keep her nurses motivated. “The staff are able to view their ‘completion status’ percentages increasing as well as receive an acknowledgement from the Director,” she says, adding that she appreciates the opportunity to check in on her nurses and identify areas they may need help with. “It allows us to support them through the journey and give feedback.”

While both like that the new system encourages committee involvement and accountability, Boxley appreciates another aspect of the new system: “Everything is very transparent, which allows people to see where they are and to ask for help if they need it.”

What advice do they have for someone who is hesitant to use the new Ladder platform? For Danciulescu, it’s all about hard-working nurses getting the recognition they deserve. “You have the entire year to work on your profile and projects, and chances are you’re already doing many of the requirements – so be acknowledged for your hard work,” says Danciulescu. “We’re here to help and are always looking for feedback to improve.”

“Anyone who fears that it’s too hard, I let them know that I will be right there with them when they apply,” Boxley adds. “I’ll walk them through the system, and even through my own application. I’ll show them where everything is. “

“Ultimately, we’re never alone,” she continues. “There are *a lot* of Clinical Ladder nurses on my floor, so they should always be able to find one. I’m also almost always available by text. It takes some getting used to, but it is vastly better than the huge binders and paper we had been using.”

Closing

As the health care industry continues to evolve and the parameters of patient care reach new territory, Hoag has prided itself on continuing to explore innovations that improve patient care while increasing the professional development of our nurses. As we have shared throughout this study, we believe the launch of the new Clinical Ladder online platform is a direct reflection of this mandate – and a sincere vote of confidence in the viability and capabilities of our nurses.

Our nurses deserve recognition for their hard work, and they should have every opportunity to advance their careers according to their ambitions. The previous version of Hoag's CLP was counter-productive to this mission, which is why it was so important for us to adapt with the times and change the method for the better.

Changing the CLP means more to us than just advancing clinical excellence to drive factors that are tied to Hoag's overall goals. If our nurses are improving and using technology to advance and become more effective in clinical outcomes, then we can prove the correlation between these outcomes and the new support system that is helping our nurses. We believe it is a matter of advancing the CLP's capabilities so we can help our nurses – and Hoag as a whole – become world renowned for exceeding the expectations of what it means to provide exceptional patient care.

Innovation is the key to moving forward, especially as the health care industry advances at an unprecedented rate – and patients' needs become more involved. Technological improvements and streamlined processes are part of the equation, but neither work without the tireless dedication of the Ladder nurses who rely on the system to help them advance and become more effective at their job. The new Ladder platform not only supports this mandate but also offers more opportunity for innovation and upgrades due to improved data tracking capabilities.

"Documenting and analyzing the benefits of a robust Clinical Ladder program has proven in the past to be elusive," says Jason Zepeda, Hoag's Sr. Program Manager, Performance Improvement. "However, now with StaffGarden and the analytics it provides, we can better leverage our talented Clinical Ladder Nurses to help drive the organization to new levels. As the healthcare industry continues to evolve, the Clinical Ladder program will be one of the major tools we use to meet patient's expectations and distinguish Hoag as a nationally recognized provider."

We are at the beginning of an exciting time for Hoag and our nurses as we delve into a new realm of personal and professional growth. As our nurses become stronger practitioners who innovate and transform, so, too, will the Clinical Ladder program. Achieving this will require communication that allows us to advance and perfect the platform, which will help our nurses redefine what it means to provide exceptional patient care.

We look forward to exploring the capabilities of the new Clinical Ladder platform with our nurses and working with them to make it a revolutionary tool that is second to none.