



Nurse-First Triage: The Case for Clinical Access

Operational insights from Conduit Health Partners' triage programs and health system clients

Health system leaders know the pressure firsthand. Patients seeking guidance after hours with nowhere to turn. Emergency departments absorbing demand that doesn't belong there. Clinical staff stretched thin. Nurse-first triage addresses all three.

By the numbers

74%

of triage calls resolved without an ED visit, every month, consistently

75%

of after-hours calls managed without physician escalation in Conduit-supported specialty group

TOP 10

call categories include minor respiratory symptoms, medication management, post-op concerns, chronic disease follow-up, and low-acuity infections — conditions a nurse can assist with by phone

80,000+

patient encounters handled across Conduit's health system client network

Reduces Emergency Department Utilization

Nearly three in four triage calls are resolved without an ED visit. That rate holds month after month, reaching 76% in winter and staying above 71% even in slower summer months.

In many communities, patients who are unsure where to go default to the emergency department. When clinical guidance is available early, more patients are directed to the right level of care before unnecessary escalation occurs.

When needs are addressed with nurse-first triage at the first point of contact:

- Unnecessary emergency department utilization decreases
- Capacity is preserved for higher-acuity care
- Wait times are reduced for patients who genuinely need emergency services
- Staff resources are protected

Manages High-Volume, Low-acuity Demand

Many of the most common concerns handled across Conduit's programs are routine but persistent access needs, including medication questions, respiratory symptoms, chronic disease follow-up, post-op concerns, and low-acuity infections.

The largest call category across Conduit's programs is patients who need nurse advice and education only, with no clinical escalation required. That matters because many patients do not need a visit first. They need timely clinical guidance, reassurance, and direction to the right next step.

Turns Demand Into A Predictable, Manageable Function

Triage activity follows consistent patterns.

While Conduit Health Partners nurse-first triage operate 24/7, for clients that use Conduit Health Partners for after-hours support, Conduit sees peak demand around 5 p.m. and on Saturdays. Overnight calls are focused on pregnancy, fever and vomiting. These patterns reflect when patients most often seek guidance outside traditional clinic hours, and triage plays an important role in helping them navigate care safely during these periods. This data also indicates that demand is not random but measurable, allowing leaders to anticipate and plan for predictable surges in access needs.

Supports Readmission Prevention And Care Continuity

Post-discharge patients are at high risk for avoidable returns, and they're calling. Post-op and post-hospitalization concerns rank in the top 10 call categories across Conduit's programs. Earlier clinical input helps address issues before they return as readmissions or more complex cases. More than **80%** of Conduit's triage nurses rate the function as highly valuable for reducing readmissions through timely follow-up and education.

When clinical guidance is available after discharge:

- Gaps in understanding are closed before they become complications
- Early warning signs are caught before they require a return visit
- Patients follow through on the right next step in their care

Reduces Risk Associated With Access Delays

Access delays carry real clinical risk. Roughly 1 in 4 nurses has witnessed or suspected a patient outcome worsen due to a delay in reaching care.

When patients cannot access timely guidance, conditions worsen and require higher levels of care. Every call across Conduit's programs is answered by a licensed registered nurse using evidence-based protocols. That clinical judgment supports appropriate escalation decisions and ensures patients are directed to the right setting at the right time.

Protects Physician Time And Supports Workforce Sustainability

After-hours call burden is a consistent pressure point for employed medical groups. Nurse-first triage absorbs that volume, so physicians are not pulled into low-acuity after-hours care.

When nurse-first triage is in place:

- After-hours call burden on physicians is reduced
- Medical staff focus on higher-acuity care
- Workforce strain decreases over time

In one Conduit-supported specialty group program, approximately **75%** of after-hours calls were managed without physician escalation, helping reducing unnecessary interruptions for the on-call physician.

In Summary

- Most patient needs can be resolved without escalation or an ED visit
- Low-acuity demand can be managed outside high-cost care settings
- Demand patterns are predictable and can be planned for
- Earlier clinical guidance reduces appropriate downstream utilization
- Delays in access are associated with worsened patient outcomes

Nurse-first triage changes how patients enter the system and how demand is distributed across care settings. With licensed nurses guiding patients earlier, health systems can reduce unnecessary ED utilization, manage low-acuity demand more consistently, protect physician time, and create a more reliable experience for patients and staff.

Data reflects operational triage activity from Conduit Health Partners' partner health system programs and insights from nurses working within Conduit-operated triage programs.

For methodology details, see [The Connected System: Insights on Patient Access and Throughput Report, 2025](#).

About Conduit Health Partners

Conduit Health Partners is a health care solutions company that connects patients and employees to the care they need, when they need it, through customized services in patient transfer, nurse triage, remote patient monitoring, including hospital at-home and patient outreach. With innovation at the forefront, Conduit is an operational partner that improves care and access for health systems, provider groups, health plans and employers via cost-effective, efficient solutions delivered by more than 200 nurses serving over 200 locations in 47 states. Conduit has improved access to care for more than 1.7 million people since its inception in 2017. Learn more at conduithp.com.