



OSF HealthCare Innovator of the Year is championing smart hospital rooms

For Immediate Release

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(April 4, 2023 | PEORIA, Illinois) – Katie Willerton, an occupational therapist at OSF HealthCare Saint Francis Medical Center, has received the OSF HealthCare 2024 Innovator of the Year award. Willerton helped to pilot a smart room that would empower patients to use voice-activated tools to independently control comfort settings in their rooms. This pilot has the potential to improve patient experience and Mission Partner (employee) efficiency.

Willerton received the award during an annual Innovation Academic Incubator (IAI) symposium at the [Jump Trading Simulation & Education Center](#).

The Innovator of the Year Award is an annual honor that recognizes individuals who are advancing our vision of transforming health care. These Mission Partners:

- Spearhead transformative change aligned with the Mission and Vision of OSF
- Bring forward new ideas and invest time in exploring novel approaches
- Demonstrate a proactive approach in fostering partnerships to revolutionize health care
- And solve complex challenges internally and within the broader community

“With nearly 30 years of experience at OSF, Katie has seen firsthand how patients suffering from new neurological injuries can feel anxious or isolated as they struggle to control their environment,” Chief Strategy Officer & CEO of OSF OnCall Michelle Conger explained in recognizing Willerton. “Katie’s work to build and pilot a smart room empowers patients to manage their comfort levels by connecting to HIPAA-compliant, voice-activated products.” Conger added, “Her effort creates opportunities for new partnerships between OSF and health care tech start-ups and has potential to create a better patient experience during their hospital stay.”

In accepting the award, Willerton said, “I look forward to relieving the anxiety and stress for patients with neurological conditions that challenge them to execute tasks such as turning on their television or adjusting the temperature in their hospital room. I believe we should leverage existing technology to make their environment in the hospital comfortable and easy to navigate while also giving nurses the ability to focus strictly on hands-on care.”

Willerton says her passion is helping patients and she can't wait to continue working with OSF Innovation to implement her vision, beginning with testing voice activation technology as a replacement for the traditional nurse call light. Eventually she hopes to give patients easy option for also controlling room temperature and their hospital room TV as well.

The veteran occupational therapist was among [five finalists](#) for this year’s Innovator of the Year award.

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OSF HealthCare is an integrated health system founded by The Sisters of the Third Order of St. Francis. Headquartered in Peoria, Illinois, OSF HealthCare has 16 hospitals – 10 acute care, five critical access, one transitional care - with 2,131 licensed beds throughout Illinois and Michigan. OSF employs nearly 24,000 Mission Partners across 150+ locations; has two colleges of nursing; operates OSF Home Care Services, an extensive network of home health and hospice services; owns Pointcore, Inc., comprised of health care-related businesses; OSF HealthCare Foundation, the philanthropic arm for the organization; and OSF Ventures, which provides investment capital for promising health care innovation startups. In 2020, OSF OnCall was established, a digital health operating unit, including a hospital-at-home. OSF OnCall delivers care and services when, where and how patients prefer to receive them. OSF HealthCare has been recognized by Fortune as one of the most innovative companies in the country. More at [osfhealthcare.org](https://www.osfhealthcare.org).

OSF Innovation is a collaborative network of different disciplines that designs bold, strategic solutions to advance the future of health care. Learn more at [osfinnovation.org](https://www.osfinnovation.org).