

CASE STUDY: IOWA SPECIALTY HOSPITALS & CLINICS

Hospital Reduces Transfers and Treats Higher Acuity Patients with Dedicated Telemedicine Team

Iowa Specialty Hospitals & Clinics, located in north-central Iowa, offers specialized care at their 25-bed Critical Access Hospitals in Clarion and Belmond, Iowa. The hospitals serve residents of this farming region due north of Des Moines and Ames. Today, both hospitals utilize Eagle's TeleHospitalist services.



Iowa Specialty Hospital – Clarion



Iowa Specialty Hospital – Belmond

CHALLENGE

Like many small hospitals, Iowa Specialty Hospitals & Clinics was having trouble recruiting providers. Tenured physicians were preparing to retire and those still working were no longer interested in being on call 24/7.

“We were very fortunate to recruit a fantastic internal medicine provider,” says Robyn Paulsen, Director of Telehealth, Community, and Business Development. “He has a young family with children, and work-life balance was important to him, as it should be.”

Retaining this highly regarded provider was important to hospital staff and administrators. “We looked for solutions to keep specialists in the area, yet provide great patient care and hospital coverage at night.”

Recognizing the nationwide trend toward the hospitalist model, Iowa Specialty Hospitals & Clinics transitioned to a hospitalist-focused approach. Telemedicine also seemed like a good fit to offset recruiting challenges.

Their first attempt with night-time telemedicine wasn't a good fit. The telemedicine system worked with a large number of providers, and every call involved a different provider. “We never got the same provider twice,” says Paulsen. “The technology was also inadequate, simply a small iPad attached to an IV pole,” she says. “It was very hard for the team to manage patients with that process, and the technology felt unrefined.”

The hospitals and clinics have a culture based on service excellence and high standards of care as well as a high Press Ganey ratings. “As we pursued telemedicine partnerships, it was vital the service must meet our high standards,” Paulsen says.

SOLUTION

Iowa Specialty Hospital – Clarion started their Eagle Telemedicine coverage on July 30, 2018, and currently has five Eagle providers. Iowa Specialty Hospital – Belmond started their Eagle coverage on July 1, 2019. This hospital also works with five Eagle providers. The TeleHospitalists are on-call primarily during the night and weekend shifts.



BENEFITS



FAST RESPONSE: Communication and trust between on-site staff and Eagle TeleHospitalists is critical. The on-site teams are well-acquainted with their Eagle TeleHospitalists, and in every instance, the TeleHospitalist has responded when needed. **“Every call has been answered instantly — always in less than 3 minutes,”** says Paulsen.



NURSING SUPPORT: The Eagle team provides support to on-site nurses. Many of the hospitals’ nurses retired after the implementation. New hires are often just out of nursing school. Often, a nurse wants to check with a physician before performing a patient care task, but hesitates to wake up a doctor. **“Now the nurse can text the Eagle TeleNocturnist and get a response right away,”** says Paulsen. The nurse can get the answer they need — and the patient gets care in real time, without waking up a provider at 1 or 2 a.m. **“That’s great continuity of care.”**



DEDICATED, PERSONABLE TEAM: The staff appreciates working with a small group of Eagle TeleHospitalists. After working a couple of months together, relationships were established with the Eagle group. Paulsen has been impressed at the conversations she sees logged in the system. **“You see the TeleHospitalist has established a personal relationship, with the kind of conversations you’d have in person, how are your kids, etc.”**



IMPRESSIVE TECHNOLOGY: The telemedicine platform was a hit with the hospitals’ providers. The GlobalMed® cart was **“impressive”** with a large monitor, audiovisual capabilities, high-resolution camera and e-stethoscope. **“The presence of the provider is lifelike, and it’s easy for the staff to manage.”**



SECURE TWO-WAY AUDIO-VIDEO CONNECTION



IMPROVED CARE: For a nurse, the last hour in the night shift is often the busiest. They tie up loose ends, which means the nurses may not remember the question they wanted to ask the doctor. **“Now, we can text an Eagle provider and get the answer right away. The instant communication is so important,”** says Paulsen.



FEWER TRANSFERS: Fewer patients transfers to tertiary hospitals occur because higher quality care is available at night. **“We’re now able to treat higher acuity patients that would have been transferred,”** she adds.

