

**CASE STUDY: GREAT RIVER MEDICAL CENTER**

# Rural Hospital Supports Local Healthcare Workers & Expands Care with Multi-Specialty Program

*Gastroenterology, Hospitalist, Neurology & Psychiatry Telemedicine Keeps Patients Close to Home*

*Located in West Burlington, Iowa, serving residents of this picturesque Mississippi River region, the hospital's service area includes southeast Iowa, west-central Illinois and northeast Missouri. This is a primarily rural area with family farms, a few industrial complexes, small businesses and small towns – great for families to raise kids, with a relatively large elderly population.*

*Great River Medical Center is a 378-bed hospital offering acute, rehabilitative, skilled and long-term care. Patients are referred to this hospital from Fort Madison Community Hospital (a community access hospital) and from seven medical clinics servicing the small towns in this region.*



## CHALLENGE

For decades, Great River Medical Center relied on a handful of local physicians to oversee patient care. When the local specialists were unavailable or overloaded, patients were referred to the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics in Iowa City or Genesis Medical Center in Davenport, Iowa — each about 75 miles away.

That's been inconvenient for most families, but these are the only tertiary hospitals in this relatively isolated region.

In November 2018, the facility was ready to explore telemedicine. The hospital's sole neurologist was overwhelmed trying to provide coverage 24/7/365. It just wasn't possible.

Great River Medical Center tried working with one provider (without success), then they reached out to Eagle Telemedicine. It was the beginning of a great partnership.

## SOLUTION

That first contract with Eagle Telemedicine blossomed into a multi-faceted program greatly benefiting the Great River Medical Center patients and community.

With the help of Eagle's specialists, the hospital began providing medical care to more patients on-site, when safe and appropriate, and avoiding transfers to the outlying hospitals.

## BENEFITS

- ✔ Critical night, weekend and holiday coverage
- ✔ Local specialists are satisfied and relieved
- ✔ Transfers dropped dramatically
- ✔ Patients and families stay close to home



# TeleNeurology: A First Step Into Telemedicine

## BEFORE TELEMEDICINE

The only neurologist at the facility was reaching burnout carrying a full patient load plus providing hospital coverage. In fact, the hospital was without neurology coverage 33% of the time (nights and weekends) because the neurologist was not available.

**“We did the math on costs and justified that it was financially cost-effective to keep patients here with TeleNeurologist coverage,” says Josh Goeller, director of Great River Medical Center’s hospitalist program. “And it was the right thing for the community.”**

The hospital reached out to Eagle Telemedicine to discuss the prospect of a TeleNeurology program. The goal was to provide complete 30-day coverage every month, so more patients could be treated on-site instead of being transferred to Iowa City.

**“If our hospitalist needs a specialist to put eyes on the patient, and our specialist isn’t available, we call Eagle,” says Goeller. “That provides seamless care for that patient.”**

In the past, Great River Medical Center transferred the patient if a neurological emergency occurred. Now, the hospital staff call Eagle. And, a TeleNeurologist sees the patient right away.

**“We reduced our transfers right off the bat,” adds Goeller. “There was no need to transfer most of our patients. We now treat 100% of those that don’t require tertiary care.”**

## IMPLEMENTATION BUILT ON BEST PRACTICES

This first implementation helped the facility learn if local physicians and nurses would get onboard. And, it was a test of the Eagle and Great River Medical Center’s implementation teams, to see if they could get TeleNeurology up and running quickly and smoothly. That success would set the stage for future telemedicine services at the hospital.

Getting the local neurologist and nurses to buy into the telemedicine program was a small hurdle for the hospital’s team.

“Our hospitalists were hesitant at first,” says Goeller. “But once they saw the TeleNeurologist’s notes and understood that the telemedicine visits went well, they were sold.”

One of the nurses questioned the use of telemedicine, but when she saw that it worked well, she helped educate the other nurses. After that, the staff got over their concerns about telemedicine pretty easily.

On-site nurses are key in preparing patients for the TeleNeurology consult. Nurses tell the patients and the patients know what to expect when the doctor appears on the video screen. While the format was new for most patients, they adapted quickly, and appreciated being seen by a doctor so quickly.



# More Services Added: TeleGastroenterology, TeleHospitalist and TelePsychiatry

*TeleNeurology was just the start. Three more telemedicine services were added in 2 years to shore up coverage.*

## TELE-GI

A few months after TeleNeurology was implemented, Great River Medical Center turned to Eagle Telemedicine with another request — Gastroenterology. In reviewing the hospital's transfers, the facility recognized it needed a Tele-GI consult "on call" when a patient's condition changed. A consult with Tele-GI allowed the facility to better identify the next steps for the patient.

Now, patients are treated at the hospital, when safe and appropriate, instead of being transferred.

## TELEHOSPITALIST

Fast-forward to May 2020, when hospitals, like Great River Medical Center, were seeing COVID-19 patients. TeleHospitalists provide relief for the on-site hospitalists during night, weekend and holiday shifts. This allows their hospitalist to handle admissions and other immediate on-site needs. Once again, the implementation went smoothly, and Eagle's TeleHospitalist program proved to be a smart move.

## TELEPSYCHIATRY

TelePsychiatry was added in June 2020 to provide night coverage of psychiatric inpatients — Monday through Friday. Before Eagle, the hospital struggled to provide 24/7 mental health coverage. Existing staff could not handle psychiatric coverage all the time, and an attempt to add an additional on-site psychiatrist didn't work out.

Eagle TelePsychiatrists handle phone calls and place prescription orders, as needed. These consults occur mostly without need for the cart — keeping the technology free for other telemedicine programs. By all reports, the TelePsychiatry service is working smoothly.

## RESULTS



**TeleNeurology patient consults last about 20% longer than traditional neuro consults.**



**With Tele-GI, nearly 100% of GI patients are treated on-site.**



# Best Practices at Every Step

## POSITIVE RECEPTION



“Eagle really knocked it out of the park, the implementation couldn’t have gone more smoothly,” says Goeller, who headed Great River Medical Center’s implementation team.



“Eagle’s implementation was a slam dunk,” says Joe Benda, LPN, Hospitalist Nurse, the Great River Medical Center team co-leader.

## IMPLEMENTATION BEST PRACTICES



*Tori Surber, MPH, Implementation Manager at Eagle Telemedicine, shares best practices for setting up a telemedicine program. She says the staff’s positive attitude and team structure forged a path to success.*



**STRATEGY:** Great River Medical Center was willing to learn, participate and ask questions. This allowed Eagle to identify and customize the solution to meet the facility’s goals.



**LEADERSHIP:** An on-site team leader, Josh Goeller, and a clinical expert, Joe Benda, LPN & Hospitalist Nurse, kept the implementation running smoothly.



**ENGAGEMENT:** It helps to have a small group of dedicated stakeholders — that’s the best situation. The hospital’s team included a representative from credentialing, IT, nursing, medical staff and administration.



**DECISIONS:** Eagle was able to outline and execute with input from department stakeholders, with the two project leaders ultimately making the decisions.

### **Great River Medical Center’s Team Structure = Success**

On a more personal level, everyone was extremely nice, very easy to talk to and work with. Super-responsive, very organized, and meticulous so that every detail was taken care of.

