

Adapting to the New Workforce Environment: Hannibal Regional Healthcare System Outreach

Rural hospitals face significant staffing shortages. Only 10% of physicians in the United States practice in rural areas despite rural populations accounting for 20% of the population. Nearly 70% of the primary care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) are located in rural or partially rural areas. Physician shortages, poverty, and geographic isolation contribute to lack of access to care and poorer health outcomes for rural Americans. The COVID-19 pandemic has only worsened existing staffing shortages. At the height of the January 2022 omicron surge, nearly one-third of hospitals indicated that they were anticipating critical staffing shortages.



Recruitment and retention of health professionals has been a persistent challenge for rural providers. Acute workforce shortages and increasing labor expenses resulting from the pandemic have placed additional pressure on rural hospitals. Many rural providers are seeking novel approaches to recruit and retain staff. Existing federal programs, such as the National Health Service Corps, work to incentivize clinicians to work in rural areas. Other programs, such as the Rural Public Health Workforce Training Network Program, help rural hospitals and community organizations expand public health capacity through health care job development, training and placement. Yet, additional and continued support to help recruit and retain health care professionals and health service occupations in rural areas is needed from state and federal governments.

Hannibal Regional Healthcare System (HRHS), Hannibal, Missouri has found a way to manage their clinical workforce and health services occupations challenges by growing their own. Hannibal Regional Hospital is a 99-bed acute care hospital providing comprehensive health and wellness services to the residents of the MO, IA and IL tristate area. Hannibal Regional has been an independent provider of health care for the past 120 years and has been at its current location for more than 30 years. Expanding beyond hospital services, HRHS now has over 1,500 team members serving 12 counties, offices located in 11 communities, 85 providers and 21 specialties.

In 2015, the Board and leadership pledged to be a truly integrated program and emphasized workforce development, education and training as fundamental to their commitment. Since then, HRHS works collaboratively with several area schools, colleges and universities to establish programs to increase opportunities to work locally at various and diverse occupations.

Specifically, HRHS has established internships, residencies, training and curriculum with Hannibal High School, Moberly Area Community College (MACC), Hannibal-LaGrange University (HLGU), the University of Missouri at Columbia (MU), AT Still University Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine (ATSU-KCOM), Culver-Stockton College and Truman State University (TSU), Kirksville. These collaborations have

proven highly successful launching dozens of health services occupational and professional careers at HRHS and elsewhere.

EARN WHILE YOU LEARN

For students graduating from Hannibal High School and other area schools as well as non-traditional candidates who plan to enter the workforce, HRHS offers internships through its patient care training program. This program will provide paid on-the-job training for individuals, allowing the opportunity for them to step into a health care career. No experience, certification, or degree is required. Qualifying candidates must have a high school diploma or GED. The Patient Care Tech roles include:

- taking vital signs
- collecting specimens
- performing catheterizations
- assisting patients with eating, personal hygiene, and grooming

For individuals pursuing college, a student hired into an approved position and enrolled in a tuition-based education program is eligible to be a part of a “Work and Learn,” program. While enrolled in an eligible program, students can work in an approved position at HRHS.

The team member can be full-time or part-time student status, and can be pursuing any field of study. Team members will be eligible for \$500 to \$2,000 each calendar quarter (13 weeks) they are enrolled in school.

Eligible positions include:

- Housekeeping
- Food Service
- Patient Care Tech
- Phlebotomy

BASIC EMPLOYMENT SKILLS TRAINING (BEST)

The BEST program was implemented in August of 2018 as a partnership between Hannibal High School and HRHS. This is an employment preparation program for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities. HRHS has hosted 22 BEST interns during the first five years of the program. HRHS employs 7 of those previous interns, and the Hannibal Public School district has been able to expand the program to include several other employers. There has been a 100% graduation rate of BEST interns, and at least 92% of them have been employed for at least six months following graduation.



NURSING TRAINING AND ADVANCEMENT

For students at MACC who are curious about a career in health care, HRHS offers them an opportunity to explore their interests. MACC and HRHS have designed the “Partnering Today for a Better Tomorrow’s” nursing program. The program allows students to work with high-end mannequins to perform simulated scenarios before they perform their clinical procedures, which they will be able to do their clinical training at Hannibal Regional Hospital.



HLGU and HRHS have partnered to serve northeast Missouri with tuition and fees for eligible nursing students and job placement within HRHS. HLGU offers nursing programs to prepare both licensed practical nurses (PN) and registered nurses (RN).

The PN program can be completed in 11 months and requires a high school degree or the equivalent. The RN program is offered within the Associate of Nursing degree program, a three-year degree. Transfer students are welcome in both programs, and those who have already completed a PN can complete the RN in as little as one additional year.

HRHS serves as a clinical training site for students in the TSU Bachelor of Science in nursing (BSN) and accelerated BSN programs. HRHS will pay for tuition and fees for eligible TSU students who commit to work for HRHS upon completion of nursing school.

Currently, these nurse training programs will launch a combined 18 RN and 3 LPN students in the workforce by May 2025.

HRHS recently announced a partnership with Culver-Stockton College to assist in broadening educational opportunities for nursing students in northeast Missouri. They will partner in the creation of an innovative program for new or advancing nurses to further their education. This program is in the creation and development stage, and will enroll its first students following a determination of the accreditation timeline.

PHYSICIAN TRAINING AND RECRUITMENT

HRHS collaborates with AT Still University Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine, Truman Medical School, Kirksville and University of Missouri, Columbia to train medical students with a focus on rural medicine.

Each year for the past seven years, HRHS served as the primary training site for two ATSU medical students. The program includes a total of 88 weeks of rotation during a student's 3rd and 4th years. 14 ATSU students have completed the program of which one is a pediatrician at HRHS. It is now entering its eighth year and, and Hannibal Regional has employed one of those former students as a Pediatrician since July of 2021.

HRHS serves as a training site for the UMC MU medical school program from which 46 percent of students in the rural training track program have gone on to practice medicine in rural areas. Starting its eighth year, HRHS hosts two med students who rotate 6 weeks between their first and second year, their entire 3rd year and from 2-4 months in their 4th year. 13 UMC MU students have rotated over the past seven years.

RURAL RESIDENCY TRAINING TRACK

Recently, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), through the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), awarded nearly \$11 million to 15 awardees to strengthen the health workforce by establishing new residency programs in rural communities. Hannibal Regional Healthcare System is one of those recipients, receiving a \$750,000 grant. By working with key partners in a 13-county area, Hannibal Regional aims to create a sustainable Graduate Medical Education Program which will benefit the more than 150,000 residents in those areas.

The project funded by the grant begins immediately, with a target date of July 1, 2026 for new internal medicine residents to begin their residency at HRHS. HRHS is the sponsoring institution pursuing accreditation with the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education and will effectively train physicians to practice in and meet the clinical needs of rural populations.

CONCLUSION

The challenges of a sufficient and stable workforce remain and rural hospitals find themselves at the center of the crisis. Shortages of health professionals were only exacerbated by the COVID-19 national public health emergency and rural hospitals have been forced to extremes in efforts to try to fill clinical vacancies.

HRHS has chosen the path to grow their own clinical workforce. In addition they have created opportunities for ancillary and support staff as part of their effort.

With committed collaborators including Hannibal High School, Moberly Area Community College, Hannibal-LaGrange University, Culver-Stockton College, Truman State University, the University of Missouri in Columbia, and AT Still University Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine, HRHS has made significant advances in reducing the shortage of health professionals while improving access to care for those living in their rural community.

And it has worked.

For additional information contact:
Susan R. Wathen, MHRM, SPHR, SHRM-SCP
Vice-President, Human Resources
Hannibal Regional Healthcare System
6500 Hospital Drive, Hannibal, MO 63401
573-406-1607 (O)
573-406-1616 (F)