

## Kearny County Hospital's Physician Recruitment Model

### Summary

- **Need:** Physicians to serve in an increasingly diverse population in rural Kansas.
- **Intervention:** Kearny County Hospital changed their recruitment model to include paid time off for doctors and midlevel providers to serve as international service workers, as well as medical school loan forgiveness.
- **Results:** Kearny County Hospital has re-opened their services to out-of-county patients and are receiving an increase in applications from medical providers.

### Description

Due to a shortage of medical providers, [Kearny County Hospital](http://www.kearnycountyhospital.com/) in Lakin, Kansas, had resorted to turning away at least 50 patients a week from 2014-2015. Its clinic doors were closed to out-of-county patients in order to keep up with their own residents of Kearny County, a sparsely populated and medically underserved area in southwest Kansas.

To address this issue, Kearny County Hospital bolstered their recruitment plan and proactively began recruiting graduates from [Via Christi's International Family Medicine Fellowship](https://www.viachristi.org/health-professionals/medical-students-residents-and-fellows/international-family-medicine-fellowship) in Wichita, Kansas. Their international medical experience was a draw for Kearny County Hospital, which serves patients from over 20 countries.



Kearny County Hospital's Dr. Lane Olson listens to the heartbeat of a premature infant in Rwanda while serving as an international service worker.

Kearny County Hospital's recruitment plan includes medical school loan forgiveness, but the main incentive is paid time off for doctors to serve internationally as international service workers. So far, doctors have taken their vacation time to work in places like Ecuador, Egypt, Somaliland, Niger, Morocco, Zimbabwe, Mexico, Jordan, India, Rwanda, Liberia, Kenya, Ghana, and Haiti. The hospital administration knowingly recruits both "goers" (commit to staying for several years, but plan on becoming full-time international service workers overseas) and "senders" (plan on staying long-term while taking their vacation time to serve internationally).

Because southwest Kansas has become home to 30 different nationalities, Kearny County Hospital believes that having international experience better equips doctors to work in rural areas of Kansas, and vice versa. The hospital's administration has found that doctors desiring to serve people in marginalized countries are more willing to serve poor patients in more isolated areas in the U.S. where health disparities are similar to what they encounter internationally.

In 2015, Kearny County Hospital created a network to support both doctors and other rural medical facilities. The 25 medical providers from the 180-mile distance from Del Norte, Colorado to Ashland, Kansas work together to recruit doctors. This model allows for adequate coverage when physicians take extended time off to serve abroad.

This video further describes Kearny County Hospital's mission:

### Small-Town Spotlight: Kearny County Hospital



### Services offered

Below are incentives established by Kearny County Hospital and their network partners to recruit mission-minded providers:

- Medical school loan forgiveness
- Up to 10 weeks of paid vacation time
- Full employment at an established medical facility
- Mission-focused mindset and policies
- Supportive board and administration
- Full-spectrum family practice medicine
- At least 1 mission-focused physician mentor
- Reasonably maintained facilities
- The national average salary, at minimum
- Limited on-call schedule and 4-day week clinic schedule to protect family life
- A significant human need for healthcare

### Results

Positive outcomes from Kearny County's recruitment and networking model include:

- 14 total providers are now employed by Kearny County Hospital: 7 physicians, 6 physician assistants, and 1 nurse practitioner.
- The increase in providers has allowed the hospital to re-open their services to out-of-county patients. The clinic has added over 180 new patients per month over the past 18 months.
- The hospital is receiving more medical provider applications than they are able to hire.
- The hospital's gross revenue has tripled in the past 10 years.
- In the last 11 years, the number of babies delivered has more than doubled between the 12 counties that surround Kearny. In the last year, Kearny County Hospital alone delivered 260 babies.
- The hospital has eliminated its use of locum tenens doctors to cover its emergency room.

The hospital board and administration have found that the benefits offered to the providers instills in them a sense of loyalty to the hospital and to the community. After returning from serving abroad, doctors bring a renewed sense of compassion and grace to their practices. In turn, the town has shown rousing support of their international mission work.

Other sources that highlight the Kearny County Hospital:

- [Refugee populations drawing doctors to rural Kansas](http://bigstory.ap.org/article/9304009dc22d47198d5f7dd820a02f19/refugee-populations-drawing-doctors-rural-kansas) (<http://bigstory.ap.org/article/9304009dc22d47198d5f7dd820a02f19/refugee-populations-drawing-doctors-rural-kansas>), Associated Press, 2017
- [Providing medicine for small community rewarding for pair](http://www.gctelegram.com/news/local/providing-medicine-for-small-community-rewarding-for-pair/article_906e9967-ec85-5b42-ad66-e5e009738e6a.html) ([http://www.gctelegram.com/news/local/providing-medicine-for-small-community-rewarding-for-pair/article\\_906e9967-ec85-5b42-ad66-e5e009738e6a.html](http://www.gctelegram.com/news/local/providing-medicine-for-small-community-rewarding-for-pair/article_906e9967-ec85-5b42-ad66-e5e009738e6a.html)), The Garden City Telegram, 2015
- [Western Kansas hospital attracts doctors through focus on mission](http://wichita.kumc.edu/news/lakin-feature-071114.html) (<http://wichita.kumc.edu/news/lakin-feature-071114.html>), KU School of Medicine – Wichita, 2014
- [A recruiting mission for rural doctors: Success found in luring physicians to western Kansas who have higher purpose](http://www.hutchnews.com/news/local_state_news/a-recruiting-mission-for-rural-doctors-success-found-in-luring/article_2b868b7b-069a-5ca4-89cc-5e1c59334d56.html) ([http://www.hutchnews.com/news/local\\_state\\_news/a-recruiting-mission-for-rural-doctors-success-found-in-luring/article\\_2b868b7b-069a-5ca4-89cc-5e1c59334d56.html](http://www.hutchnews.com/news/local_state_news/a-recruiting-mission-for-rural-doctors-success-found-in-luring/article_2b868b7b-069a-5ca4-89cc-5e1c59334d56.html)), Hutchinson News



*Dr. Lane Olson examining a baby at Kibogora Mission Hospital in Rwanda.*

### Barriers

Like many other rural hospitals, Kearny County Hospital faces financial challenges due to declining reimbursement from payers and its significant number of uninsured patients (Kansas is one of many rural states that have not expanded Medicaid). But provider compensation and benefits have proven to be sustainable as the recruiting, networking, and hard work from their providers is paying off. Prior to Benjamin Anderson being recruited to fill the hospital's CEO position, the board, administration, and medical staff had a similar mission as they do now, but it was not as well-known. Since Mr. Anderson stepped in, their aggressive recruitment plan and networking model has increased their effectiveness and made an avenue for their mission to operate at a higher caliber.

### Replication

- Recruit more than 1 doctor at a time. Good physicians don't often practice alone and the custom of having a solo family practice doctor per rural area is fading.
- Be generous with your paid vacation policy. In the long-run, this will make more financial sense than staffing an emergency room with locum tenens doctors.
- Be willing to share your doctors with other medical facilities, or implement other ways that will allow more medical coverage to a larger population.
- To prevent physician burnout and to increase staff retention, limit clinic days to 4 days a week. Limit emergency room calls to no more than 1 night a week and 1 weekend out of every 5.
- Be willing to pay your doctors the national average salary (at the minimum) on top of extended time off.
- Send your administration and board members to travel abroad with your doctors so that they can better understand what you are supporting.
- Develop a mission-focused culture within your organization, administration, and board before you recruit staff.

### Contact Information

Benjamin Anderson, CEO

[Kearny County Hospital \(http://www.kearnycountyhospital.com/\)](http://www.kearnycountyhospital.com/)

620.355.7111

[banderson@kearnycountyhospital.com \(mailto:banderson@kearnycountyhospital.com\)](mailto:banderson@kearnycountyhospital.com)

### Topics

Hospitals

Loans, loan repayment, and loan forgiveness for health careers

Physicians

Recruitment and retention of health professionals

**States served**

Kansas

**Date added**

February 8, 2016

*Please contact the models and innovations contact directly for the most complete and current information about this program. Summaries of models and innovations are provided by RHIfhub for your convenience. The programs described are not endorsed by RHIfhub or by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy. Each rural community should consider whether a particular project or approach is a good match for their community's needs and capacity. While it is sometimes possible to adapt program components to match your resources, keep in mind that changes to the program design may impact results.*