

Running any hospital has its numerous challenges. With budget cuts, changing trends, technological advances, and the need to elevate the level of care, hospitals must overcome many obstacles. However, these obstacles are even greater for rural hospitals. From accessibility challenges to a greater amount of uninsured patients, below are some of the most common difficulties rural hospitals face. What changes can these hospitals make to overcome these challenges?

Access Issues

Due to locations in more remote areas, longer travel distances to these hospitals can create problematic situations. If a patient does not have reliable transportation, they may delay receiving care, which could worsen health conditions and ultimately result in care that is more expensive when it is received.



Aging Workforce

More rural hospital workers are reaching the age of retirement, creating a fear of a workforce shortage in the future. With an increasing care demand from baby boomers, hospitals will be challenged to meet the needs of these patients.

Patient Demographics

According to the [American Hospital Association](#), chronic diseases are up to 1.4 times more common in rural than urban areas. Therefore, rural patients are more likely to have diseases such as hypertension, chronic bronchitis, and diabetes.

In addition, the percentage of the population living at a poverty level is also greater in rural areas. This means that more patients may be uninsured, making rural hospitals more dependent on outside programs. Rural hospitals many times become responsible for the costs of treating uninsured patients, creating financial concerns. In addition, the unemployment rate in many communities nationwide is not helping this problem as more patients are without health insurance.

Limited Technology

Technology has helped make major advancements in healthcare, however technology is lagging inside rural hospital doors. Acquiring electronic health records however is not a top priority within these hospitals. [HealthLeaders Media](#) explains that, “only 6% of rural healthcare industry executives surveyed said that technology systems/equipment was the top priority on their agendas.” The cost of acquiring such systems remains an obstacle.

Smaller Size

With a limited amount of beds in rural hospitals, costs per patients tend to be higher with less to distribute the costs across. These hospitals are still responsible for providing a broad range of care and with limited patients, the financial future can be difficult to predict.

What can your hospital do?

Rural hospitals face challenges every day and future financial security is a main concern. For example, in 2010 it was reported in [The Daily Citizen](#) that “62% of rural hospitals [in Georgia] were in the red.” This seems to be the representation of many rural hospitals nationwide. With nearly 2,000 rural community hospitals ([American Hospital Association](#)) in the country, how can these facilities overcome the never-ending challenges?



It is most important that your hospital first identifies its key ongoing concerns in order to best develop a system that fits its specific needs. If technology is a main concern, make sure your staff is properly trained on any essential software programs. In addition, if your hospital is looking to implement electronic health records, make sure all staff and patients are on board to get the most out of the new technology. After support is received, training will also be critical.

Recruitment and retention should also be a main focus for rural hospitals. With an aging workforce and thin staff, make sure your hospital is working to recruit and retain those employees who will contribute to future success.

With many rural hospitals in the red, make sure you are purchasing equipment that will last to get the most for your dollar. Focus on employee injury prevention can provide significant cost reductions. Carts such as the [Ergo-One System® Utility Cart](#) are ergonomically designed to prevent on-the-job injuries to back, arms and wrists due to loading and unloading and pushing carts with heavy loads. Vertical handles are at a comfortable level, and shelves are positioned to reduce back and shoulder strains from bending and loading/unloading. Ergo-One carts are very versatile for transporting a variety of products over various floor surfaces and the stainless steel design makes it easy to clean and sanitize. With electronically welded seams, this cart will ensure more durability for your hospital. Make sure your hospital invests in equipment that will contribute to various results.

From accessibility, technological disadvantages, to a smaller size, rural hospital are facing a variety of challenges each and every day. By developing processes to address the obstacles, hopefully these hospitals can continue to provide much needed care.

What challenges is your hospital facing? What programs have you put in place to address these concerns?