

How a Rural Hospital Expanded Services and became a Top Critical Access Hospital in the “Middle of Nowhere”



Problem Overview

Glasgow (population: 3,500) is located in the far northeastern corner of Montana, along the “Hi-Line” of the state. The town is about 300 miles in every direction from the nearest large city, with not much in between, making it the most geographically isolated location in the contiguous 48 states. Researchers at Oxford University officially dubbed it the “Middle of Nowhere” a few years ago.

The 25-bed Frances Mahon Deaconess Hospital (FMDH) in Glasgow is the only hospital for 150 miles, with a service area of 10,000 people. It was crucial for FMDH to be able to provide as many primary and specialty healthcare services as possible, given the area’s isolation. However, recruiting surgeons and other healthcare talent to a rural area is already challenging—and even more so when even the nearest Walmart is 150 miles away.

Given their dedication to the community, leaders at FMDH were concerned that when they lost their orthopedic coverage, that they would not be able to recruit any qualified providers. However, when FMDH partnered with Synergy Health Partners, they were able to recruit not one, but three orthopedic surgeons working under the Surgicalist Model. These three Surgicalist physicians provide the hospital 24/7 surgery and specialty care coverage. Now, the hospital is one of the Top 100 Critical Access Hospitals in the Nation and is now the only facility in Montana to have Advanced Total Hip and Knee Replacement Certification from the Joint Commission in collaboration with American Association of Orthopedic Surgeons (AAOS) and the American Joint Replacement Registry (AJRR).

What FMDH Needed

Local surgeons at FMDH were burning out, working to exhaustion because they knew they were the sole providers for the Glasgow community. Previous openings for local staff had gone vacant for long periods of time, resulting in revenue loss and fewer services for an already medically underserved region. When the orthopedic surgeon position opened, FMDH leaders knew that replacing the only doctor who was providing general orthopedics, total joints, and on-call services would be a tall order.

The Solution

Synergy and FMDH worked together to deploy the Surgicalist Model, a long-term staffing and management program. This involved bringing in three Surgicalist surgeons to the hospital’s orthopedic surgery program. These three Surgicalists each travel into Glasgow for a rotation of 10 to 12 days per month, during which they provide 24/7 call coverage, perform surgical cases, and see clinic patients.

Surgicalists are surgeons who are dedicated to a hospital facility and who work preset shifts covering call and acute inpatient consultations. Unlike temporary locums physicians and travel clinicians, Surgicalists are part of the hospital staff and team; they support local clinicians, serve on committees, and work side-by-side with hospital administration to grow programs and improve operations.

“The Surgicalist team covering Frances Mahon Hospital gives our hospital 24/7/365 coverage, while still letting patients develop a relationship with a doctor locally, instead of needing to drive 300+ miles for specialty care.”



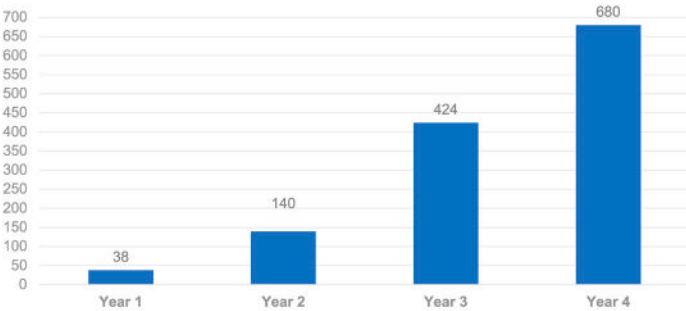
The Results

The Surgicalist team covering FMDH now provides the hospital 24/7/365 coverage, while still letting patients develop a relationship with a doctor locally, instead of needing to drive 300+ miles for specialty care. This is significantly more than the facility was able to offer before, as the three rotating Surgicalist surgeons provide coverage that is the equivalent of 1.4 full-time staff surgeons—quite an accomplishment for a hospital that was struggling to recruit a single provider for this position.

Since FMDH partnered with Synergy, the hospital achieved Advanced Total Hip and Knee Replacement Certification from the Joint Commission. And it is the only facility in Montana to attain this recognition. Furthermore, it has been named one of the Top 100 Critical Access Hospitals in the Nation.

The Surgicalist model has been so successful for FMDH that the hospital is now working on expanding its General Surgery specialties with Synergy.

Patient Surgical Volume



Surgicalist Program enabled: consistent staffing, volume increases, and patient access.



“The Ortho [Surgicalist] Team is a Dream.”

Summary

In conclusion, the partnership between Frances Mahon Deaconess Hospital and Synergy Health Partners demonstrates the true value of a Surgicalist program for any rural hospital struggling to recruit qualified surgical and specialty doctors and provide 24/7 coverage for the community that depends on them. It also provided the potential for them to grow their services and create a center of excellence in their local community.

SYNERGY SUPPORTS:

1. Predictable staffing
2. Facility Volume & Program Growth
3. Patient Access
4. Certification

To learn more about Synergy Health Partners’ innovative staffing models for hospitals, visit Synergy-HP.com/models.

