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Missouri Rural Health Association Partners with Avera eCARE® to Help Rural Hospitals Implement
Tele-emergency and Tele-hospitalist Services

Request for Proposals to be Issued. Five Hospitals will be Selected.

(Jefferson City, Missouri, April 13, 2020) - Rural communities lack access to primary, mental health and specialty care services. Couple that with 14 rural Missouri hospital closures in recent years and the picture becomes even more pronounced: rural communities require innovative solutions to supply health professional shortage areas with technology infrastructure support and board-certified, credentialed medical expertise.

“Six Missouri rural counties lack a primary care provider and 71 counties lack obstetrics,” said Missouri Rural Health Association (MRHA) Executive Director Melissa VanDyne. “These health disparities persist in rural communities due to healthcare workforce deficits, distance to care, little or no transportation options, and socioeconomic factors. Rural residents are poorer and must overcome practically insurmountable barriers to access quality care. As a result, emergency departments become their entry to care in hospitals that are workforce and cash strapped.”

With support from the Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH), MRHA has partnered with South Dakota-based telehealth provider Avera to address these issues through an initiative called the Avera eCARE® Emergency and Avera eCARE Hospitalist Program. MRHA, based in Jefferson City, Missouri, develops partnerships to identify and address barriers to care in rural areas, while advocating for rural health policy issues. Similarly, Avera partners with hospitals to provide resources that increase patient access to care and hospitalist support.

Avera eCARE has more than 25 years of experience in telehealth and serves more than 500 facilities. Avera eCARE Emergency provides rural clinicians with immediate access to board-certified emergency medicine physicians and nurses to help diagnose and treat stroke, heart attack, trauma, and other acute conditions. Its emergency staff is licensed, credentialed, and privileged at each participating rural hospital to support the bedside team with patient care, documentation, and transfers.

Avera eCARE Hospitalists work in conjunction with local facility medical staff to provide high-quality care and management of complex medical and surgical patients age 18 years and older. This is especially crucial for rural hospitals who also staff clinics. eCARE Hospitalists step in to provide admission support/consultation, inpatient consultations, and cross cover services at the request of the bedside physician, practitioner, or nurse.

“We partner with the local providers, as a colleague, when they would like some additional assistance,” said Dr. Skow, eCARE Chief Medical Officer. “It could be as simple as supporting transfer arrangements so they can keep their hands on the patient, or as complex as running a code while they are taking care of the patient in the next room. We can virtually present in the room within seconds, giving us the ability to evaluate the patient prior to the bedside provider's arrival. This partnership can prevent provider burnout and save careers.”

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Interested hospitals in MFH's service area may respond to VanDyne's request for proposal (RFP) to be issued in the coming days. Hospitals will have six weeks to submit proposals from the RFP issue date. A total of five hospitals will be selected for this three-year program to implement either tele-emergency or tele-hospitalist.

Selection criteria include need, program implementation capacity and sustainability. Selected hospitals have a financial stake in program implementation, with the smallest expenditure in year one (25%), and increasing expenditures over years two (50%) and three (75%).

The program's overarching goals are help hospitals:

- Build sustainable tele-hospitalist and tele-emergency programs that increase access to care by eliminating geographic barriers,
- Provide data sharing and reporting,
- Improve quality health care delivery and patient outcomes,
- Augment lapses in available emergency department physicians,
- Provide specialty care services for things like stroke, heart attack, trauma, and other acute care conditions,
- Increase hospital revenue and staff retention.

"Addressing access to care for rural Missourians is crucial in improving the health and well-being of our communities," said Bob Hughes, president and CEO of MFH. "At a time like this, when being able to provide support for hospital staff in treating high-acuity patients is more relevant than ever, we are hopeful and excited about the possibility of a more coordinated and advanced system. This work will ensure patients can receive care closer to home, better connect physicians to specialists and provide innovative solutions to support rural hospitals."

MRHA and Avera will coordinate efforts to ensure the program covers hospitals end to end. MRHA's team will serve as a liaison to assist Avera and participating hospitals. Support includes technical assistance, telehealth policy and regulatory updates, broadband capacity expansion, as well as other support.

Avera will conduct site assessments, identify equipment needs and procurement costs, educate and train, collaborate with hospital IT teams and medical staff to implement the program which will take approximately 13-15 weeks, onboard its remote medical team, as well as provide credentialing and privileging, among other services.

VanDyne said hospitals could be able to launch this fall.

For more information, contact MRHA Executive Director Melissa VanDyne at 573.645.8243, or email melissa@morha.org. You may also visit <https://mrhassociation.org>. For more information about Avera eCARE, visit <https://www.averaecare.org>.

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About:

Missouri Foundation for Health (MFH) is a resource for the region, working with communities and nonprofits to generate and accelerate positive changes in health. As a catalyst for change, the Foundation improves the health of Missourians through partnership, experience, knowledge, and funding.

Missouri Rural Health Association (MRHA) is a nonprofit, grassroots, member-driven organization. Its mission is to safeguard and improve the health of rural Missourians. MRHA accomplishes its mission by engaging in partnerships and providing leadership on rural issues through advocacy, communication, and education.

Avera eCARE, based in Sioux Falls, S.D, offers one of the largest and most comprehensive virtual health networks in the world – partnering with more than 500 health care systems, rural hospitals, outpatient clinics, long-term care facilities, assisted livings, schools, correctional facilities – across the country.