

Broadband USA Applications Database

Applicant Name: Waccamaw Community Hospital (Georgetown Hospital System)

Project Title: GHS Rural Health Broadband Project

Project Type: Sustainable Adoption

Executive Summary

The purpose of this project is to increase access to health care services for rural South Carolina utilizing the ability of the Georgetown Hospital System (rural regional hospital system) use the bandwidth of the Palmetto State Providers Network (PSPN) and the National Lambda Rail (NLR) to provide advanced patient care technologies and telemedicine services such as an Electronic Health Record (EHR), remote pediatric monitoring and access to specialty consultations.

The delivery of health care throughout South Carolina is hampered by transportation barriers and uneven distribution of health care providers. The demands on the system are increasing due to an aging, unhealthy and poor population. Research indicates that rural people are more likely to be older, disabled, uninsured, and suffer from one or more chronic health conditions. In these remote rural areas, advanced technologies mean increased access to health care and better health outcomes.

Currently, the providers in rural areas have little or no broadband capabilities. The funding provides them with broadband connectivity to the Hospital System and provide technical support, training, education and broadband service via the PSPN & the NLR. The use of “off the shelf” components managed remotely allows rural providers to “plug in” and access all services.

While the Hospital System has been very proactive in building infrastructure and providing access to providers where possible, the Hospital System is unable to afford the build-out of infrastructure to link many rural providers. The grant is sought to complete the infrastructure needed to provide health technologies to rural health professionals. The funding will provide them with broadband infrastructure with the Hospital System providing technical support, training, education and broadband service.

The program will connect 100 rural (NOFA) health professionals and pharmacies to Georgetown Hospital System. When connected, the providers gain access to services like e-prescribing, a CCHIT approved EMR, and specialty consultations (oncology, rehabilitation geriatrics and pediatrics) which improve patient outcomes. In addition, they have the capability for secure streaming of large amounts of patient

data such as health records, lab & test results, PACS imaging, video consultation and real-time patient monitoring. The project also allows for development of patient and provider education programs delivered via broadband. Currently implemented examples include CME/CEU for health staff, patient consultations and availability of streaming imagery and patient data.

The Hospital System has been very successful in implementing integrating telemedicine projects as standards of practice. One project using the connectivity of the PSPN and NLR that has become standard practice in the Hospital System is the use of “tele-stroke” technology, particularly in the Emergency Department (ED). When a patient arrives in the ED with signs of a stroke, the patient is connected to an EEG cart and the ED physician consults the specialist via the link. The tele-physician receives real-time EEG data and receives imaging as it is completed. This implementation of best practices into the standard of care has proven invaluable in providing timely treatment in a rural hospital system where specialist care is not present. A similar tele-psych program is being brought online.

The Georgetown Hospital System service area (Georgetown, Williamsburg and Southern Horry Counties) is located in the coastal region of South Carolina, and is considered rural as defined in the NOFA. The service area of the covers contains 22,659 households in 77 incorporated communities, the largest of which has about 8,900 residents. Part of the area is a Low Income Primary Care HPSA, most is designated as an MUA, and the entire area has been designated a Low Income Dental HPSA. The three largest ethnic groups are White (59%), Black (39%) and Hispanic (1.6%). More than 17% of the population lives below poverty level, 7% of students are eligible for reduced lunches and 54% are eligible for free lunches.

The Georgetown hospital system currently maintains connectivity and provides support, software, training and equipment to two hospitals and 22 sites in rural South Carolina. As evidence of our ongoing effort to supply sound technology in healthcare, the System has received local and national recognition from health technology organizations, was named to the National List of Most Wired Hospitals and is recognized as State Leader in Medication Tool Kit Initiative. In addition the System has built a state of the art 10,000 square foot Information Systems building to meet the increasing capability and demand for technology based healthcare delivery. The building has been designed to withstand hurricane force winds and flooding, provides windowless UPS/network rooms, water cooled racks, fire suppression and other features necessary for the secure transmission and housing of health data.

One FTE support positions are estimated to be created for this project as existing personnel will be used for implementation. However, the project will help maintain the jobs of over 2000 employees in the

hospitals and in rural provider office and pharmacies. Georgetown Hospital System is the largest employer in Georgetown County.

The overall project cost is \$1,377,880. The total request is for \$998,300 with the Georgetown Hospital System providing \$379,580 as match. Match is 28% of the total budget (20% required).