CHG Healthcare




CASE STUDY

# Building consistency: A recurring orthopedic partnership in rural Minnesota

## Background

For many rural hospitals, keeping specialty care close to home is a delicate balance. Recruiting a full-time orthopedic surgeon can be difficult in communities with smaller patient volumes, geographic distance, and tight budgets. When orthopedic services go away, patients feel it right away, and so does the hospital's bottom line.

At Murray County Medical Center (MCMC) in Slayton, Minnesota, leadership wanted to strengthen the hospital's orthopedic services without committing to full-time recruitment or relying on inconsistent outside coverage.

## The challenge

Murray County Medical Center wasn't actively looking to add orthopedic coverage when the conversation began. Finding the right approach meant weighing the community's need for consistent care against the hospital's operational and financial realities, and it meant looking past the traditional locum tenens conversation.

For MCMC, the priority wasn't simply filling a staffing gap. It was keeping patients close to home, keeping orthopedic revenue and referrals within the hospital, and building something sustainable rather than a quick fix.

## The solution

Through ongoing relationship-building, Weatherby and MCMC developed a recurring "visiting specialist" model, pairing the hospital with Dr. Melissa Koenig, a board-certified orthopedic surgeon and locum tenens physician, for consistent, part-time coverage rather than a one-time placement.

Rather than serving as a short-term fill-in, Dr. Koenig became a familiar, steady presence at MCMC, providing ongoing orthopedic care timed around the community's needs. For rural and critical access hospitals, this model offers an alternative to the assumption that specialty care requires a full-time, permanently recruited physician.

Keeping care local also helps the hospital hold on to the services that come with it, like physical therapy and rehabilitation, along with the revenue they bring.

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## The results

Nearly a year into the partnership, Dr. Koenig has become a valued, familiar face on the MCMC care team. Hospital leadership completed a highly positive provider evaluation, citing her clinical quality, professionalism, communication, adaptability, and collaboration with staff.

The recurring model has also delivered on the goals that mattered most to MCMC:

- Patients get consistent, local access to orthopedic care, without the drive to a larger regional center
- The hospital keeps orthopedic surgeries in-house, along with the downstream revenue tied to services like physical therapy and rehab
- Care teams benefit from a steady, dedicated specialist instead of rotating or inconsistent outside coverage
- The model's success has opened the door to expanding into additional specialties

Murray County Medical Center's experience shows that recurring locum tenens coverage can be more than a stopgap for unexpected vacancies. It can be a deliberate, sustainable strategy for rural and critical access hospitals to strengthen specialty access, protect revenue, and build partnerships that last.

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