

THE CRITICAL NEED FOR SUPPLEMENTAL IT RESOURCES IN RURAL HOSPITALS

Rural hospitals play a crucial role in providing health care services to underserved communities, often acting as the primary (or only) source of medical care for residents. These facilities may face unique challenges, such as operating with limited resources. One pressing issue recognized by rural hospital executives involves the challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified IT resources and specialized skill sets, which have become increasingly vital in the modern health care landscape. Here's why supplemental IT resources are essential for rural hospitals:

- 1. Advancing Telemedicine Services:** Telemedicine has revolutionized access to health care, particularly for patients in remote areas. Supplemental IT resources can support the infrastructure required for telemedicine platforms, ensuring reliable connectivity, high-quality video consultations and the secure exchange of patient data. Without robust IT systems, rural hospitals may struggle to offer these critical services, leaving patients without timely and comprehensive care.
- 2. Ensuring Data Security and Compliance:** The health care industry handles vast amounts of sensitive patient data, and rural hospitals are no exception. Supplemental IT resources can help these facilities bolster cybersecurity measures, protecting patient information from breaches and ensuring compliance with regulations like HIPAA. For hospitals with limited budgets, these resources are vital to mitigate risks and avoid costly penalties.
- 3. Improving Operational Efficiency:** Many rural hospitals rely on outdated technology, which can slow down administrative processes and clinical workflows. Supplemental IT resources can modernize systems, streamline operations and reduce the burden on overworked staff. For example, upgrading electronic health records ("EHR") systems can improve data access and coordination among health care providers.
- 4. Addressing Workforce Shortages:** Rural hospitals often face challenges in attracting and retaining health care professionals. Supplemental IT resources can alleviate some of this strain by enabling remote consultations with specialists, automating routine tasks and providing staff with the tools they need to work more effectively. This can enhance both employee satisfaction and patient outcomes.
- 5. Enhancing Emergency Preparedness:** In certain emergencies, such as natural disasters or public health crises, having robust IT systems in place is critical. Supplemental IT resources can improve communication and coordination, ensuring rural hospitals are better prepared to respond to urgent situations and protect their communities.
- 6. Remote Staffing Models:** Rural staffing models are being leveraged more often, especially for specific skill sets that may not be available locally, or to reduce the overall staffing cost.

THE GROWING DEMAND FOR HEALTH CARE IT PROFESSIONALS

The health care IT job market is experiencing robust growth, with the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projecting a 16% increase in employment for health information technologists and medical registrars from 2023 to 2033, significantly outpacing the average for all occupations. [Bureau of Labor Statistics (August 29, 2024)].

In order to ensure the appropriate complement of resources, each hospital should develop and frequently review its roles and responsibilities matrix, which is comprised of job skill requirements and an outline of any skill gaps, so they can validate that their organization has the critical and specific resources for the ever-changing IT landscape. Below are some examples of those Health Information Technology ("HIT") roles:

- **Cybersecurity Specialists:** These specialists protect health care organizations from cyber threats, ensuring the security of computer networks, devices and patient information. This resource also participates in ensuring **HIPAA compliance**. There has been a significant uptick in ransomware, personal information mining and exploits.
- **Health Information Technologists:** This role manages and organizes patient health information, ensuring accessibility, security,

quality and compliance with regulations.

- **EHR Implementation Specialists:** These specialists play a crucial role in the successful implementation of EHR systems, providing training, support and troubleshooting for the organization.
- **Clinical Data Analyst:** These individuals validate the gathered data and provide precise insights, working in settings such as clinics, pharmacies and hospitals, where regular updates and data management are necessary.
- **Health Informatics Professionals:** These professionals provide secure health care software systems for health care organizations and keep them safe while also analyzing critical information.

Key advantages of IT professionals in health care include:

- **Streamlining Health Care Workflows:** IT professionals help improve efficiency, productivity and profitability by fine-tuning hospital workflows and removing redundancies.
- **Understanding and Complying with Health Care Regulations:** IT professionals ensure that hospitals, clinics and other health care providers operate according to the laws, regulations and guidelines that govern the industry. Because regulatory requirements are frequently updated, staying current is essential to maintaining compliance and avoiding costly audits or penalties.
- **Governance and Compliance:** IT leaders have the knowledge and experience to develop and review business technology plans and understand how to implement them in the most efficient way. This would include areas like HIPAA, HITRUST and regulatory matters.

THE HALL RENDER ADVISORY SERVICES ADVANTAGE

Hall Render Advisory Services has the experience and depth of knowledge to be your one-stop information technology partner, bringing years of experience and expertise to help your organization maintain compliance, develop more efficient business processes, prioritize resources and improve the overall IT environment. Hall Render Advisory Services takes a structured approach to identifying specific needs and gaps to provide those necessary skill sets (both local and remote) to support the critical needs of your organization. Supplemental IT resources are not a luxury but a necessity for rural hospitals striving to meet the demands of modern health care.

By investing in these resources, our team can partner with the leaders of health care organizations to overcome challenges, improve patient care and ensure the health and well-being of rural communities.

If you have any questions, please contact:

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