

CASE STUDY:

Hendry Medical Center

BACKGROUND

Hendry Regional Medical Center (HRMC) is a 25-bed Critical Access Hospital in Clewiston, FL, serving rural Hendry County, a medically underserved community where the stroke age-adjusted death rate significantly exceeds state norms. Rural residents face a 30% greater risk of stroke mortality compared to urban counterparts.

THE CHALLENGE

HRMC faced compounding barriers that made high-quality acute stroke care extremely difficult to deliver:

- No on-site neurologist to evaluate patients and initiate thrombolytics
- Late recognition of stroke symptoms at triage
- Inconsistent stroke alert activation across departments
- Documentation gaps in time-stamp accuracy, NIHSS scoring, and dysphagia screening
- High interfacility transfer rates that disrupted stroke care continuity
- A GWTG-Stroke Rural Overall Composite Score of 74.9% in 2023, well below national benchmarks

THE SOLUTION

HRMC partnered with TeleSpecialists to implement a structured teleneurology program in two phases. The approach combined virtual board-certified specialist access with deep clinical education and data-driven workflow refinement.

Phase 1: Stroke Workflow Redesign (2023-2024)

- Designated a stroke champion to lead team education on workflow and national best practices
- Delivered targeted training for nursing staff on early stroke symptom recognition at triage
- Established EMS pre-arrival notification with concurrent TeleSpecialists alert for any BEFAST+ case identified in the field
- Implemented early medication mixing on verbal orders for identified thrombolytic candidates

Phase 2: TeleNeurology Rounding Program (2024-Current)

- Launched structured daily virtual rounds with TeleSpecialists neurologists for coordinated inpatient stroke management
- Integrated real-time telemedicine assessments directly into the ED stroke alert workflow
- Implemented chart audits evaluating documentation accuracy, imaging timeliness, and thrombolytic decision-making
- Established monthly multidisciplinary reviews to monitor performance trends and refine workflow barriers in real time

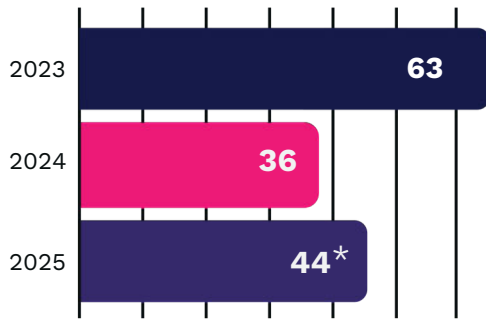
Takeaways

- HRMC partnered with TeleSpecialists in 2023 to close critical gaps in AIS care and deliver the gold standard of stroke care locally.
- Combining remote specialist access, clinical education, and standardized workflows drove a 43% reduction in average DTN time in the first year and lifted the GWTG-Stroke composite score from 74.9% to 95.1%.
- HRMC grew its stroke admission rate from zero in 2022 to six in 2025, earned Joint Commission Acute Stroke Ready certification, and established a replicable model for rural hospitals nationwide.

THE OUTCOMES

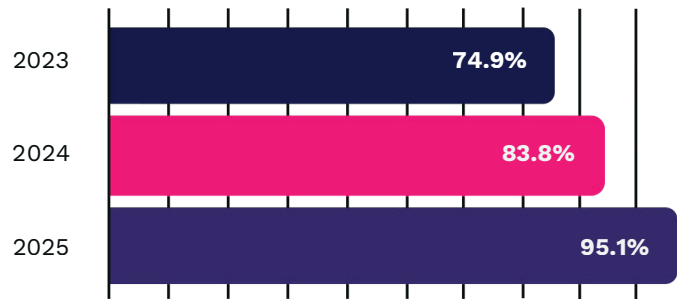
The implementation of the TeleNeurology program and improved workflows produced measurable improvements across three key indicators.

HRMC Door-to-Needle Median Times

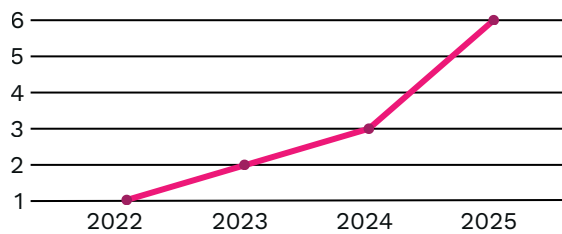


*Five of six 2025 cases involved AHA-allowable delays, including shared decision-making and hypertension management. Year-to-date 2026, the door-to-needle median has returned to 36 minutes.

GWTG Stroke Rural Overall Composite Score



Acute Ischemic Stroke Admission Rates



IMPACT

The partnership created meaningful impact across three dimensions: for patients, for the hospital, and for the broader rural community it serves.

Patient Impact

- Specialist-level neurological evaluation within minutes, without transfer
- Every 15 minutes saved in DTN time preserves measurable brain function
- Patients remain near family and familiar providers during critical recovery

Operational Impact

- Eliminated the default of transferring all suspected stroke patients
- Staff competency in AIS response improved significantly across all departments
- Documentation quality and regulatory compliance improved across all tracked metrics

Community & Equity Impact

- Hendry County residents can now receive the same stroke care standard as major medical centers
- Reduction in transfers addresses a key driver of rural health inequity
- HRMC's model demonstrates a replicable framework for rural hospitals nationally