

THE RURAL DOCTOR CONUNDRUM: SIX KEYS TO RURAL RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION



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The Rural Doctor Conundrum: *Six Keys to Rural Recruitment and Retention*

The healthcare challenges faced by rural communities make headlines regularly. This is a hot topic and will continue to be for decades to come. People who live in rural settings are often among those who need healthcare the most and are often unable to easily access the care they require. Right now, rural communities are facing a patient access crisis for a number of reasons. According to the [NRHA](#), populations in rural communities are older, sicker and poorer than at any time in recent history.



Despite the growing healthcare needs within large rural geographic regions, the number of doctors practicing in rural areas is in short supply. The statistics are alarming: According to [this report](#), 20% of the U.S. population lives in rural areas, but the ratio of physicians to patients is 1 to 2,500. That means that approximately **60 million are struggling to access healthcare services.**

Rural doctors are dedicated, but they face incredible challenges. While the population they serve has greater healthcare needs, there are 25% fewer doctors per person than in urban areas, and half as many specialists, (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

Adding to the issue, the NRHA reports that around 1,000 physicians a year discontinue rural practice due to retirement, disability or death, while only about 700 take their place.

It's no surprise that attracting and retaining physicians to rural areas is difficult. To be successful, it is essential to understand and build strategies around these **Six keys to rural recruitment and retention.**

Rural Practice Offers a Broad Range of Experience



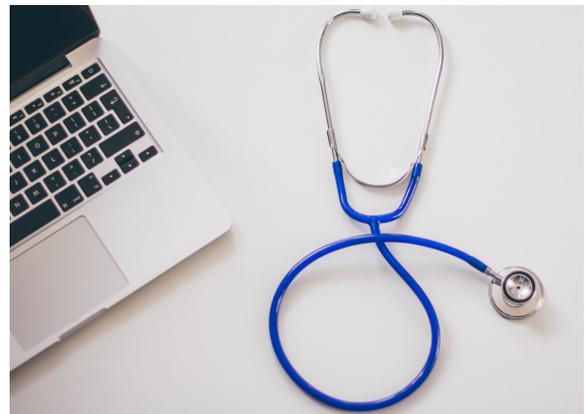
One of the unique benefits for rural doctors is the broad range of experience they can receive, right off the bat. Large distances between hospitals and providers, combined with a lack of specialists in general, lands more patients in the family

physicians' offices. Because of this, doctors located in rural areas will work on a broad range of cases in ways they might not otherwise have been exposed to in an urban setting. The growth of telemedicine for consults gives rural physicians access to excellent specialists to support their efforts.

Young doctors, or those just starting, can find the depth of opportunity that comes with rural practice appealing. These doctors don't want to be a cog in the wheel, but rather wish to make a difference in more significant ways.

Rural Doctors Can Enjoy More Autonomy

Autonomy is an important benefit for rural physicians. The smaller size of rural facilities makes them less bureaucratic, with more access to leadership and administration. Rural physicians are often given a role in shaping policy. They have a voice in the process, allowing them to maintain clinical autonomy and



preserve practices that enhance physician/patient relationships. Even with all the healthcare mergers over the last few years and the growing numbers of hospital-employed physician practices, there are still physicians who value their independence. Rural healthcare facilities are better able to offer the type of independent practice these physicians are looking for.

Rural Doctors Can Thrive in Unique Areas that Offer Excellent Quality of Life

Physician burnout is still a growing epidemic in healthcare. According to the 2019 Medscape report “National Physician Burnout Depression and Suicide,” almost two-thirds of physicians reported experiencing burnout symptoms. In addition to a lack of control or autonomy, quality of life issues - such as lengthening work days - was noted as burnout factors. As the rates of burnout continue to increase, some physicians are placing more value on lifestyle factors in their decision on where to practice. Rural destinations offer a different pace and variety of lifestyle that maximizes play alongside work.

Additionally, rural facilities are often in a better position than larger institutions to customize the role to suit the doctor in the recruiting process. There is less red tape to cut through to respond to the unique needs of each physician.



Clinical Support Can Make a Big Difference



Professional isolation can be a serious symptom experienced by rural doctors. They have fewer colleagues on location and a much smaller professional network to turn to for support. Additionally, given the unbalanced patient to doctor ratio, rural doctors can find it difficult to experience and enjoy the quality of life they are searching for.

To overcome this obstacle, rural healthcare locations can supplement staff through an expanded network of nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and locum tenens physicians. Also, technology and more specifically telemedicine can also help lessen feelings of isolation or disconnection.

Rural Salaries are Higher for Physicians

Although it might seem counter-intuitive, rural doctors' salaries are much higher than those of their urban counterparts. [This study](#) found that on average rural doctor bring home approximately \$30,000 more per year.

To maximize the attractiveness of your offer, pair the salary differential with cost of living data for your region. The advantages of choosing a rural practice increase when housing and other expenses are taken into account.

Finally, it is important to remember that although salary may attract a physician candidate, it is not an effective retention tool. Professional satisfaction and quality of life far outweigh salary when it comes to retention.

Physician Sourcing Strategies are Critical

Finding qualified physician candidates for rural practices can be difficult. It is imperative that rural physician recruiters maintain an effective sourcing strategy. A pipeline robust with qualified candidates is the only way to identify rural physicians.

Rural physician recruiters are faced with aggressive recruitment goals and a much smaller candidate pool. It is vital that you understand the five keys to rural recruitment and retention. With your pipeline established, customized communication strategies will help you stand out in this highly competitive recruiting environment.

As you build your recruitment strategy, supplement your candidate pipeline with a partner like Katon Direct who offers verified talent funnels and high conversion rates.



Over 300 healthcare facilities partner with Katon Direct for their most challenging recruitment needs. For over 15 years Katon has pioneered connecting healthcare facilities with the most qualified clinical candidates.

With over 8 million candidates in our industry-leading database, we can help fill your talent funnel with qualified candidates.

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