

# Accelerero Helps Rural Hospital Develop Regional Spine Center



Integrated program improves care and coordination of services for spine patients

## ■ AT A GLANCE

- 316-bed acute care community hospital
- Large, rural, geographic market with a low number of spine surgeries per capita
- 174 inpatient surgical spine cases per year

## ■ ISSUES

- Three year decline of 34% in surgical spine cases
- Limited coordination with primary care providers (PCPs) for referrals
- Disjointed continuum of care for spine patients

## ■ RESULTS

Implemented a plan for a regional spine center with a fully-integrated care pathway – from prescribing physician through post-surgical care – for improved efficiency, patient care and volume growth.

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## INTRODUCTION

The hospital is a 316-bed acute care hospital in a rural setting with a large geographic footprint. Although the hospital has an established base of neurosurgeons and pain management experts, a significant portion of the spine cases in the market were going to larger facilities over 100 miles away.

Patient awareness of the hospital's spine care capabilities was low. Sub-specialists were not aligned with one another and referral patterns were not understood. A lack of coordination with local PCPs resulted in a large amount of unnecessary MRIs. Post-surgical care was disjointed, often being done by the competition. Accelerero was brought in to create a plan for a regional spine center that offers efficient and effective care.

## SOLUTION

The plan was created to build a virtual spine center followed by a physical location with consolidated services. Accelerero was hired to complete a portion of the implementation, leaving the remaining elements for the hospital to do on their own. The major focus areas included: an integrated process of care for spine patients, referral source and patient education, and improve patient outcomes for greater satisfaction.

## Integrated Care Process

Overwhelmingly, the majority of MRIs were being prescribed by PCPs (FIGURE 1) and only 6.5% of the patients referred to neurosurgeons were surgical candidates. Patients were receiving care in isolated pockets, not always getting to the appropriate providers at the right time. Outpatient rehabilitation was being done mainly by competitors. Surgeons were interested in seeing more surgical procedures while the PCPs wanted to insure the well-being of their patients.

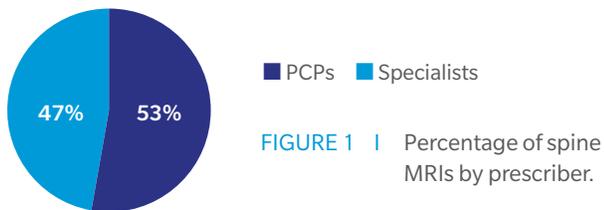


FIGURE 1 | Percentage of spine MRIs by prescriber.

To more efficiently and effectively treat spine patients, Accelero interviewed the PCPs and specialists to create a treatment algorithm and introduce it (FIGURE 2). By collaborating and agreeing on treatment recommendations for spine patients, the PCPs and specialty providers were able to improve patient care coordination, reduce unnecessary testing and increase surgeon efficiency.



FIGURE 2 | Development process for integrated care model.

## Education

The cornerstone to community awareness for spine issues is typically driven by the PCPs in the area. An education event was organized by Accelero and hospital personnel for the PCP community to introduce the

treatment algorithm. Additionally, a bi-monthly continuing medical education event at the hospital to review cases was recommended to continue the momentum. By providing the PCPs with a complete understanding of the hospital's offerings and working with them to coordinate the treatment of both surgical and non-surgical spine injury patients, the hospital became an extension of the physician's office in the care process. Doing so helped to minimize unnecessary testing and office visits while growing volume. With this knowledge, physicians were less inclined to send their spine patients to the larger centers outside of the market.

## Improve Surgical Spine Care

Customer service scores for the spine program at the hospital were below the HCAHPS 50th percentile. Specifically, the hospital ranked poorly for all but doctor communication. Also, both the coded complication rates and length of stay for spine cases were high as compared to the Accelero hospital database. An integrated care process was developed to enable the hospital to streamline spine patient flow and ensure the appropriate level of care is provided. Communicating expectations and the timing of events was part of the recommended solution to improve spine patient outcomes and increase patient satisfaction.

Further recommendations included the hiring of a spine navigator to coordinate care between the appropriate sub-specialties and a physical therapist expert for spine injuries. Next steps consisted of: integrating the two hospital-owned outpatient physical therapy centers, identifying affiliate facilities in the outlying areas to solidify the continuum of care for spine patients, and include physical therapy in the new center for a complete solution.

## SUMMARY

Accelero assessed the hospital's current spine offerings, created a two-phased plan and implemented a number of key elements to improve patient care and efficiency while reducing unnecessary testing. As a result, the hospital was able to build stronger ties with referring PCPs and greater awareness in the community, positioning it to take advantage of the nearly \$5 million margin opportunity for spine care in the market.