

Background

A 200-bed facility serving a growing suburban population faced a persistent challenge in maintaining consistent access to cardiology expertise. With only one part-time cardiologist on staff, the hospital struggled to cover nights, weekends, and high patient volumes in both the emergency department and inpatient units. This often led to delays in care, high patient transfer rates, and dissatisfaction among clinical staff.

The Challenge

- 1. Limited Cardiology Coverage:** The local cardiologist could not provide 24/7 access.
- 2. High Patient Transfer Rates:** Nearly 40% of cardiac patients were transferred to larger tertiary centers, costing the hospital revenue and creating patient frustration.
- 3. Delays in Critical Care:** ED physicians often lacked immediate specialist input, slowing decisions for AFIB, Cardiomyopathy, and cardiac decompensation.
- 4. Staff Burnout:** Hospital staff reported stress from navigating complex cases without consistent cardiology support.

The STeM Solution: TeleCardiology + Virtual POD Model

The hospital partnered with **Specialist TeleMed (STeM)** to launch a **TeleCardiology program** designed to provide timely, reliable, and consistent cardiology expertise.

Key elements of the program included:

- **24/7 Virtual Access to Board-Certified Cardiologists** via secure video consults.
- **Rapid EKG and imaging review** to guide ED and inpatient teams in real time.
- **Support across settings;** emergency, inpatient, and outpatient follow-ups.
- **Dedicated POD of Physicians:** Rather than rotating through a large, impersonal pool, the hospital was matched with a small team of **five STeM cardiologists** who became deeply familiar with the hospital's staff, workflows, and EMR.

Results

Within the first year of implementing STeM's TeleCardiology program, the hospital reported measurable value, including:

Clinical Outcomes

- **Faster Consults:** Median cardiology response times dropped to under 7 minutes.
- **Reduced Transfers:** Transfers for cardiac care decreased by 42%, keeping patients local.
- **Improved Outcomes:** Heart failure readmissions decreased by 18% within the first year.

Operational & Financial Impact

- **Increased ED Throughput:** Faster cardiology decisions reduced ED boarding times.
- **Revenue Retention:** By keeping more cardiac patients in-house, the hospital recaptured an estimated \$1.4M in annual revenue.
- **Certification Support:** Improved cardiology access strengthened the hospital's readiness for advanced chest pain center accreditation.

Staff Experience

- **Consistency:** Working with the same small group of cardiologists created trust and familiarity between hospital staff and virtual specialists.
- **Collaboration:** Nurses and ED physicians reported smoother workflows and fewer communication breakdowns.
- **Morale Boost:** Staff described the program as a "game changer," noting that it felt less like outsourcing and more like adding colleagues who understood their hospital culture.

Hospital Testimonial

"Having a consistent group of STeM cardiologists who know our team and our workflows has made all the difference. It's not just virtual coverage; it feels like an extension of our hospital family. Our staff is more confident, our patients are better cared for, and we're keeping more of our community here at home."

— Chief Nursing Officer

Why STeM's Virtual POD Model Matters

- **Dedicated Relationships:** Small, consistent teams improve trust and communication.
- **Cost Efficiency:** Hospitals avoid paying for full-time cardiologists or costly locums while still ensuring 24/7 access.
- **Seamless Integration:** POD physicians learn the hospital's protocols, reducing friction and delays.
- **Sustainable Staffing:** The POD approach balances physician workloads while preventing hospital staff burnout.

Conclusion

By partnering with STeM for **TeleCardiology services**, the hospital transformed its ability to provide timely, high-quality cardiac care. The intimate **Virtual POD Model** not only improved outcomes and reduced transfers but also strengthened relationships with hospital staff, making telemedicine a true extension of the care team.

Contact Specialist TeleMed (STeM) to learn how our TeleCardiology + Virtual POD Model can bring cost efficiency and consistency to your hospital.