

Copper Queen: Rural Telemedicine Keeps Specialty Care Local

Copper Queen brings specialty care to a small town.



\$1.4 million

Generated in savings in the first 6 months.

236 miles

Between Copper Queen and the Phoenix hub.

90%

Patient satisfaction score in regard to virtual health

At a time when rural hospitals across the country are closing their doors, Bisbee's Copper Queen Community Hospital is financially healthy, thanks to virtual health. Leaders of the critical access hospital, located near the Arizona-Mexico border, adopted virtual care to keep expert medical treatment available in an underserved community of roughly 5,500 residents.

A founding member of Arizona's first telestroke network

Copper Queen's virtual health journey began with telestroke, in collaboration with the Mayo Clinic hub in Phoenix. That partnership was not an isolated pilot. Copper Queen was one of seven spoke hospitals in the Stroke Telemedicine for Arizona Rural Residents (STARR) network, the first telestroke network established in Arizona, funded by the Arizona Department of Health Services and designed to serve rural, remote, and underserved communities.¹

When Copper Queen joined the network in January 2009, it sat 236 miles (380 kilometers) from the Phoenix hub, the farthest spoke in the network, with no local neurologists on staff. Vascular neurologists

at Mayo Clinic delivered emergency stroke consultations by video, around the clock, to patients who would otherwise have faced hours of transport before seeing a specialist.

Across the network, clinicians enrolled 443 patients and completed telestroke consultations in 97% of cases. STARR benchmarked well against national and international telestroke programs, and it later evolved into a national telestroke network through which more than 32,000 telestroke patients have been assessed and treated at Mayo Clinic.¹

Former Bisbee Mayor, Jack Porter, credits Copper Queen's telestroke service with his recovery. He walked within a few hours of a paralyzing ischemic event

From one program to a virtual specialty hospital

Under the forward-thinking vision of Copper Queen CEO Jim Dickson, the hospital expanded well beyond stroke care. It has added telecardiology, teleneurology, teleburn, telepediatrics, and teleconcussion programs, frequently partnering with Mayo. The teleconcussion program includes baseline studies of high school athletes, so post-injury scans can be compared to diagnose concussions accurately.

Virtual health has also protected the hospital's bottom line. Because Copper Queen no longer transfers every patient with atrial fibrillation to Phoenix or Tucson, its telecardiology program generated more than \$1.4 million in savings and revenue in its first 6 months.

Dickson attributes the hospital's high patient satisfaction scores, a remarkable 90% among emergency room patients, in part to virtual care. "We're becoming a virtual hospital in the specialty levels of medicine," he said. "We initially thought that a television would create a barrier, a not-so-caring environment. But it's not true."

"When the doctor comes on, the patient is just so happy to have a specialist like that in a small hospital"

Jim Dickson, Copper Queen CEO

How GlobalMed supports rural hospitals

Copper Queen's story reflects what virtual health makes possible when specialists are scarce and distances are long. GlobalMed's eNcounter® platform delivers real-time specialist consultations synchronized with diagnostic data, and paired with integrated devices such as the TotalECG® 12-Lead cardiac monitor, it brings cardiology, neurology, and other specialties to the bedside without requiring patients to travel or hospitals to build new facilities.

For critical access hospitals working to stay open and keep care close to home, that combination of clinical reach and financial sustainability is the difference between a community with a hospital and one without. It is the everyday work behind A World Without Disparity of Care®.

Sources

1. Demaerschalk BM, Aguilar MI, Ingall TJ, et al. Stroke telemedicine for Arizona rural residents, the legacy telestroke study. *Telemedicine Reports* 2022;3(1):67–78. DOI: 10.1089/tmr.2022.0002.