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**Creative Brief**

**Summary**

Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital is a vital resource for healthcare that serves the population of Murphy, Clay, Cherokee, and Graham County, operating as a rural hospital in the stated communities.

Rural hospitals make up about 35% of all hospitals in the U.S. Given that rural hospitals tend to be much smaller, patients with higher acuity often travel or are referred to larger hospitals nearby. As a result, in rural hospitals, the acute care occupancy rate (37%) is less than two-thirds of their urban counterparts. (Baxley, 2023)

The NC Rural Health Research Program at UNC-Chapel Hill defines a rural hospital with the following criteria:

* A Critical Access Hospital
* A Rural Emergency Hospital Any short-term general acute, non-federal hospital located in a non-metro county (Association, 2021)

The Center for Healthcare Quality and Payment Reform identified seven North Carolina hospitals at "immediate risk of closing because of the severity of their financial problems." A 2022 report by N.C. Health News found that the state's at-risk hospitals are primarily based in poorer rural counties with more racially and ethnically diverse populations than most rural counties. (Baxley, 2023)

Despite many of the hospital closures occurring in the eastern portion of North Carolina, it is essential to stay ahead of any negative trends that may affect healthcare in the western region of North Carolina in the future.

To ensure that Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital remains a critical part of the culture, the Erlanger marketing team and Johnson Group will create a marketing plan that highlights its connection to the community, establishes itself as the premier place for healthcare, and integrates new services that improve the lives of its patients.

**What do we want to accomplish?**

* Maintain regional healthcare leadership by focusing on strategies for patient-centered services.
* Integrate providers into the community, utilizing business development and marketing outreach strategies.
* Create memorable patient experiences by incorporating patient testimonials on digital and print platforms.
* Promote the Longevity of Western Carolina Hospital throughout the region using ad placement and messages focused on always being available.

**How will success be measured?**

* Patient Experience - we will collect and measure data using patient surveys and digital comments on social media.
* Measure patient volumes throughout the year for new and current providers
* Assess digital platform engagement metrics when sharing patient testimonials.
* Measure service volumes for high-value service lines promoted during FY25

**Who (or what) is the competition?**

 *Local Hospitals and 24-hour Care*

* Blue Ridge Medical Center
* Chatuge Regional Hospital
* Appalachian Mountain Health
* Union General Hospital

Establishing Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital as the first choice for healthcare is essential because large competitors are slowly entering our region. Union General has already pushed into the area. However, most recently, it was announced that Advent Health would be opening a hospital in Buncombe County. The opening of another hospital may affect patient volumes within the Graham County area. We also know that Fannin recently changed to Blue Ridge Medical Center, which has reduced the number of patient services.

The changes to the services at Blue Ridge Medical Center and the growth of larger regional competitors mean our focus must be to stay ahead of incoming trends. Staying ahead of the trend will require a message that shows Erlanger Western Carolina is the healthcare team that’s always been here, and will continue to support the community.

**Target Audience**

To understand our audience and their motivations, we must understand the primary population census of each county within the region.

**Cherokee**

* Total Population - 28,774
* Employment rate - 45.9%
* Media Income - $49,254
* Median Age - 52.9 Years Old (Census, 2022)

**Clay**

* Total Population - 11,089
* Employment rate - 45.1%
* Media Income - $57,065
* Median Age - 54 Years Old (Census, 2022)

**Graham**

* Total Population - 8,030
* Employment rate - 47.5%
* Media Income - $46,010.00
* Median age - 45 Years old (Census, 2022)

**Audience Profile**

According to the United States Census, the region's average age is 50 years or older, the average population is 15,964, and the average income is 50K per year. Understanding the census information helps us build our target audience's marketing profile. Using US census data and the Erlanger Health Needs Assessment, the following distinct demographic markers have been identified.

* Primary Blue Collar (Farmer, Manufacturer, Mechanic, Manual Labor)
* Baby Boomer and Directly Post Baby Boomer Generations
* Primarily Caucasian
* Have received a high school diploma
* Families with three or more kids
* Male and Female
* Working 60+ hours a week

**What does the audience think & feel now?**

Despite the hospital closure in the east region of North Carolina, our audience may wonder when these types of closures will come to their region. They fear their hospitals will be the next close. Additionally, national television stations and high-ranking politicians have used closures as a political tool. Our audience worry that the rural hospitals in the region will close and leave them lacking in emergency healthcare. Because Erlanger have been affected by understaffing, the fear of being treated is heightened considerably.

**What do we want them to think & feel?**

We want our audience to feel comfortable and secure knowing that Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital is here for the long term. We want to gain the trust of our audience as we show them that Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital and the staff are a part of the community.

**Why should they think/feel this way?**

The reason for feeling/thinking this way is in the "why." The why for this campaign is simple. We want our audience to trust us with their health and the health of their families. We want them to know that Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital is here to stay.

**What is the tone and personality we want to project?**

Approachable Authority

**What is the most important thing we want people to take away (net takeaway)?**

**Key Message:** You've had many firsts throughout the years. Throughout these firsts, Erlanger Western Carolina Hospital has supported you, our patient. we have been here ensuring that your firsts keep coming because you are the first reason we remain committed to your health. Visit Erlanger.org/westerncarolina to learn more about our commitment to keep your health first.

# References

Association, A. H. (2021). Rural Hospial Closures Threaten Access .

Baxley, J. (2023, May 19). *Disparate Issues Shape Rural Health - N.C. Health News (northcarolinahealthnews.org)*. From Disparate Issues Shape Rural Health - N.C. Health News (northcarolinahealthnews.org): Disparate Issues Shape Rural Health - N.C. Health News (northcarolinahealthnews.org)

Census. (2022). *Census*. From data.census.gov.