

*“We did not have this level of behavioral health support in our emergency departments before. PMC has made a significant difference in our ability to take care of patients.”*

**Kristie McCoic, VP affiliate administrator  
Gunderson St. Joseph’s Hospital and Clinics**

## Case Study: Gunderson Health System + PMC

Gunderson Health System began using PMC Telehealth (formerly Integrated Telehealth Partners) in 2023 for virtual mental health assessments and patient placements in the emergency departments at six Wisconsin-based hospitals. Gunderson, which is now part of Emplify Health, consistently ranks as one of the top critical access hospital systems in the country. Addressing the needs of patients experiencing symptoms of a mental health disorder is challenging for many emergency departments.

Most ED staff, including physicians and nurses, are not specifically trained to handle behavioral health crises. Behavioral health patients often require longer assessments and specialized care, including placement in an inpatient psychiatric unit. Discharging behavioral health patients can be complicated, requiring coordination with social services, outpatient providers, housing support, and family members.



“Prior to implementing PMC in our emergency departments, our clinicians and local law enforcement were having to make difficult care decisions without the guidance of a mental health specialist,” said Kristie McCoic, VP, affiliate administrator, Gunderson St. Joseph’s Hospital and Clinics. “So we were looking for the ability to immediately reach a psychiatric specialist for guidance and to help us develop a plan so behavioral health patients could safely leave the ER. That was what drew us to PMC, having a mental health expert on call 24 hours a day.”

Patients experiencing symptoms of a mental health challenge can quickly be connected to an PMC behavioral health specialist for assessment and treatment planning.

### Smooth Implementation

When PMC was first being implemented into Gunderson hospitals McCoic checked with hospital staff to see how the process was going and if any mental health assessments had occurred.

“It was almost like, ‘Well, yeah, that is what we do now,’” she said. “It was amazing how smooth things went. That’s how you know it was a good rollout. A lot of times you implement a change and it’s clunky and people might be like, ‘We don’t like this.’ With PMC there were no complaints. It was so smooth and our clinicians and nursing staff got the specialty support they needed.”

PMC completes an average of 21 psychiatric assessments per month for Gunderson Health System. PMC providers respond to requests for assessments in about 47 minutes. This has helped reduce the number of behavioral health patients who leave the hospital against medical advice. The assessments have also reduced the number of behavioral health patients who return to the ED. Less than 7% of patients who were assessed by an PMC provider returned to the hospital in 30 days during a recent three-month period.

### Patient Placement

About half of PMC’s assessments for Gunderson hospitals result in patients being placed in a mental health inpatient unit. Most emergency departments are not set up for clinical staff to spend hours calling inpatient units to check for availability and to schedule an intake. That’s another service PMC provides. In many cases, PMC’s crisis managers will make multiple calls to find an appropriate placement for a patient. An average of 62 placement calls are made per patient. Most placements are achieved in less than three hours.

“That’s the other part that was so attractive to us,” McCoic said. “PMC is handling all of the placement phone calls. That significantly reduces the workload on our staff who were spending hours on the phone working on placements for patients.”

ITP shares case details with Gunderson hospitals so they can see exactly what it took to get a patient out of the ER and into a more suitable treatment facility. Reports show which facilities accepted patients and how many times they denied patients.

“PMC can share the call log with us so we can see exactly who and when they called to get placement for a patient,” McCoic said. “This allows us to help reorder the list of places PMC calls. We may be able to help speed up placement because we know a couple of places that might work better for our community.”

### **ITP Brings Peace of Mind**

With PMC Gunderson’s clinical staff and local law enforcement officers, who are often tasked with helping people suspected of experiencing a mental health crisis, no longer have to worry about whether they are doing what’s best for a patient suspected of experiencing a mental health crisis.

“When you know a proper assessment has been completed and an appropriate plan of care has been made, it gives you peace of mind that we’re doing what’s best for our patients,” McCoic said.

Psychiatric Medical Care is proud to partner with systems like Gunderson and Emplify to improve patient outcomes and relieve staff stress. PMC provides similar services to clinics, mental health centers and correctional facilities.

To learn more about how PMC Telehealth can help your staff and patients visit [psychmc.com](http://psychmc.com).

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