



## George E. Weems Memorial Hospital (FL)

George E. Weems Memorial Hospital (Weems) is a 25-bed critical-access facility that operates health clinics in Carrabelle and Apalachicola, FL. The hospital has strong ties to its community and to the Florida State Office of Rural Health, and those relationships helped pass a surtax solely to improve the quality and delivery of healthcare in Franklin County.

Weems leadership worked diligently to increase staff retention and education. Management invested in employees by implementing a salary parity to improve staff wages; reassessed hospital employee benefits; and provided additional training for revenue-cycle team members.

Though the Carrabelle and Apalachicola clinics offer residents primary care and other services, the county experienced a shortage of needed care. To recruit more providers, Weems in partnership with Tallahassee Memorial Healthcare and Alliant Management Services, welcomed Dr. David Newton in November 2020 to provide primary care services to area residents and visitors. In addition, Weems partnered with Florida State College of Medicine's Florida Blue Center for Rural Health Research & Policy to develop a program to provide mental health screening for local Veterans.

CORH takes an individualized approach to each hospital and develops technical assistance to solve their most pressing challenges. In reflecting on the experience of being in our cohort, CEO David Walker said, "our finances were low, CEOs were fluctuating frequently, and the Franklin County Commission had to decide what to do with the hospital." CORH helped the County Commissioners understand the pros and cons of keeping Weems as a critical access hospital versus reducing it to an emergency room-only facility. "Our partnership with CORH helped bring Weems to another level of sustainability. CORH let us know that we were not alone."

Though Weems was a Year One cohort hospital, CORH still supported and followed the hospital as the COVID-19 pandemic brought challenges to healthcare providers across America. Weems updated its processes and messaging to become a hub of information for the community, providing tests and vaccinations for the residents of Franklin County. Walker worked with the Florida Hospital Association to collaborate on a regional approach to COVID needs where providers shared of best practices and ensured coordination of care.

A positive note during the year was when Walker was named Florida's Top 2020 Rural Health Leader by the National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health. Walker said he owes his success to listening and relationships. "You find the need through listening, and you fill the need through cooperation. It's all about building relationships, collaboration, partnerships, and thinking out of the box." Walker was also featured in the April 27 episode of the podcast, [Rural Matters](#).

CORH looks forward to partnering with a new cohort of hospitals and fostering outside the box problem solving.