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AN ONLINE SERIES BY THE GOVERNANCE INSTITUTE

# Reid Health: Leading through a Pandemic

JANUARY 2022



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1245 Q Street, Lincoln, NE 68508

(877) 712-8778

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# Reid Health: Leading through a Pandemic

## Organization Profiled:

### Reid Health, Richmond, Indiana

*Craig Kinyon, President and CEO*

*Tom Hilkert, Chairman of the Board of Directors*

## Statement of Interest

The COVID-19 pandemic brought many sudden challenges for hospital and health system leaders. In the beginning stages, patient volumes went down significantly. Community members were suddenly avoiding critical care due to the fear around COVID. At the same time, expenses increased dramatically, causing a complete financial storm. Physicians and caregivers were also feeling uneasy and worried about contracting the virus and how that would impact them and their loved ones. Reid Health took several steps to carefully address each of these issues and successfully navigate through this unprecedented time. While many paused their strategic plans, the board and senior leaders pressed forward, continuing with their goals to grow the organization and focus on what matters most: the health of the communities they serve. Strong governance helped lead the way, with a historically high-performing board that is dedicated to continuous improvement and carrying out the mission of Reid Health.

## A Profile of Reid Health



Reid Health is a health system in Richmond, Indiana, that includes a 231-bed hospital on its main campus and numerous satellite locations in the region of Eastern Indiana and Western Ohio. The system's service area is home to about 280,000 people and includes six Indiana and two Ohio counties.

Reid Health offers nationally recognized quality and technology with a personal touch that sets them apart. The organization's growing team is known for going the extra mile to make sure patients and families are made to feel as comfortable and cherished as possible when they find themselves in need of the system's services.

Mission: To lead our communities to well-being, one person at a time

### Vision:

- Healthier people
- Thriving communities
- Trusted partner

### Values:

- Excellence
- Empathy
- Integrity
- Accountability

## Combating Fear at the Start of the Pandemic

When the pandemic hit, Reid Health, like all hospitals and health systems, faced many new, unforeseen challenges.

The first hurdle was helping people to feel safe enough to come into the hospital setting. Although the board and senior leaders were working diligently to set up processes and protocols to protect patients and staff, community members were hesitant to receive care and many were avoiding entering the hospital at all costs. “We had people staying home with symptoms of stroke, chest pain, heart attack, and severe orthopedic fractures,” said Craig Kinyon, President and CEO of Reid Health. “What would be so strong to keep people from coming in with those sorts of problems? Fear. They were afraid if they came into the hospital, they might catch COVID and die, so they stayed at home with these and other problems.”

Reid Health took many steps to combat this fear and encourage people to come back into the hospital and clinics. For example, letters were sent to every patient from their physician’s practice explaining what the hospital was doing to keep patients safe. This was effective in helping the community understand the precautions being taken and Reid Health’s commitment to patient safety.

Declines in patient volume led to the second challenge: declining revenue. This, mixed with the increase in expenses caused by the pandemic—such as the need to buy additional personal protective equipment (PPE), clean the hospital more frequently, add staffing in certain departments, and more—was creating two polarizing problems. Expenses were going up, while revenue was going down.

Fortunately, receiving CARES Act funding served to remedy liquidity at a critical time for Reid Health. “If you don’t have liquidity, you’re not going to make payroll. If you can’t make payroll, you’re going to be out of business,” Kinyon said. “Had that not come in, we would have had double-digit million-dollar losses easily, as every organization across the country would have as well. This was a very unprecedented time in history of our dealings with the government and how to get paid.” This provided Reid Health with the funds needed to keep operating, ensuring staff still had a place to work and they could continue serving the community.

The third challenge was keeping employees happy and engaged in their work. Fear was not just among community members; staff were feeling it, too. The coronavirus was unlike anything they had experienced before. There were many unknowns and it was highly contagious, so clinicians were afraid of being exposed to the virus and what that would mean for them, as well as their families.

Physicians in specialties that were at higher risk for contracting the virus, such as ENTs and anesthesiologists, felt especially exposed. Senior leadership and the board had always been focused on addressing physician well-being and burnout, but they knew that now, more than ever, this had to be a priority.



## Building Physician Resiliency

### Pre-COVID: Setting the Foundation

Prior to COVID, Reid Health was very active in addressing physician well-being and burnout. They formed a Physician Engagement and Resilience Committee (PERC) to ensure the issue received the attention it deserved. This committee was tasked with coordinating efforts across the system to create a more positive and supportive environment for the medical staff.

The committee and leadership found that what really builds resiliency is physicians being around other physicians. Their medical staff lounge had become a “ghost town,” according to Kinyon. The design had not evolved throughout the last 13 years and it didn’t reflect the needs of today’s physicians. Across the hall was a medical staff library, which nobody used due to everything being electronic. The PERC was tasked with working with an architect to redesign these two rooms.

“**T**he realization is the antidote to burnout is to build physician resilience, but to build physician resilience you have to get physicians talking and meeting with other physicians. That’s how they recharge.”

—Craig Kinyon, President and CEO

They enhanced the food options and provided hot breakfast for physicians, especially encouraging outpatient-only physicians to come for breakfast and see their colleagues before going to their practice. This became a huge attractor. Physicians were socializing more, meeting peers in person, and building new relationships. “The realization is the antidote to burnout is to build physician resilience, but to build physician resilience you have to get physicians talking and meeting with other physicians. That’s how they recharge,” Kinyon said. They also turned the old medical staff library into a full gym with top-of-the-line equipment and added in workstations. Physicians took ownership of the space and started using it regularly.

Another challenge they saw for physicians was the amount of time spent on administrative tasks, such as taking detailed notes and entering information into the electronic health record. To support physicians, they made investments in new software and hired coders. The goal was to reduce daily frustrations caused by inefficient technology, make these tasks easier, and ultimately allow physicians to spend more time doing what they love—taking care of patients.

By tackling some of these problems head on, before the pandemic amplified the physician burnout crisis, Reid Health was more prepared to deal with the new physician stressors that came up during the crisis.

## Tackling Physician Well-Being during COVID

With COVID, they expanded their efforts to support physicians. Some physicians were so busy that they didn't always have time to get to the cafeteria and eat, so people from the community catered meals for them. This was a way of saying "thank you" and reminding the medical staff that they are appreciated during this difficult time.

There was also concern among physicians that the lower volumes of patients coming into the hospital would affect their pay structure. Instead of paying physicians based on their RVU production—which would have meant some physicians were paid a significantly reduced amount—they paid them what their average was as a guarantee. "So, if they are working at half the volume, they still got paid their average



guarantee because we didn't want to penalize them for this. It wasn't their fault, and that would have some long-term implications," Kinyon said. The board and senior leaders at Reid Health believe that a happy, fulfilled medical staff contributes significantly to the success of the organization and the well-being of patients.

Due to COVID precautions, there were often several people in isolation, which made staffing difficult. Recognizing this challenge, Reid Health adapted through utilizing Helping Hands<sup>1</sup> to support physicians and nurses in various ways. For

example, every time nurses entered a room with a COVID-19 positive patient they would have to put on new PPE and when they left the room to get something or take a phone call they would have to undress and then re-gown to go back into the room. This was exhausting for them and it was clear that they were going to go through too much PPE. To counter this, they had people handling phone calls for nurses and bringing them messages. If they needed something in the room, nurses and physicians could just call and someone would pass it through and hand it to them without getting into the contamination area.

To help with staff and patient safety, they also brought in Rosie, a robot designed to eradicate the virus that causes COVID-19 in the air and on surfaces using ultraviolet light. Environmental services staff would clean the room and then put Rosie in it. This helped ensure they were taking every measure possible to keep everyone safe.

Many nurses and doctors were being asked to work long hours and were stressed about childcare at the height of the pandemic. To help ease these worries, Reid Health built a childcare center for employees and hired KinderCare to run it. They made sure everything was set up for a COVID environment, for example, adding extra sinks for

1 Helping Hands are extra technicians or employees from other departments who are embedded on the nursing floor and perform tasks such as answering phones and getting supply items for the frontline clinical staff.

washing hands. This was a huge relief to parents who were overwhelmed with the impact of COVID on their daily lives, and a plus for physician recruitment as well.

Physician recruitment, retention, and resilience is also a top governance priority at Reid Health. The board is supportive of any measures that make the organization a better place to work, and this strong commitment at the top helped ensure these initiatives were carried out successfully.

**"I** never stopped bringing forward recommendations to the board for property, for buying new equipment, for recruiting physicians, for any of that. We never missed a beat. I saw nothing different in our behavior from a strategic perspective for moving the organization forward than it would have been pre-COVID."

—Craig Kinyon, President and CEO

## **Continuing with Strategic Plans**

During the pandemic, challenges were continually arising, but the board and senior leadership never paused their strategic plans. It was important to them to keep moving forward and growing the organization for the future.

"I never stopped bringing forward recommendations to the board for property, for buying new equipment, for recruiting physicians, for any of that," Kinyon said. "I know a lot of people hunkered down and pulled back on spending. We never missed a beat. I saw nothing different in our behavior from a strategic perspective for moving the organization forward than it would have been pre-COVID."

Even in the midst of the pandemic surges, the board continued to monitor, proceed with, and complete strategic initiatives. For example, they continued their efforts to expand into neighboring communities by putting in several new clinics to make receiving care more convenient for patients. Reid Health designed a new clinic in Winchester, Indiana, and had a groundbreaking ceremony during the pandemic, and they recently broke ground on another clinic.

"If you were to go back and look at the board's meeting agendas pre-pandemic and during the pandemic, you would see very little change," said Tom Hilkert, Chairman of the Board of Directors. "Everything we were doing, everything that was going on, we managed to keep going on." The only item they added was a COVID update to each board agenda. In May 2021, they even had their strategic planning off-site retreat where they reviewed and updated their strategic plan for the next several years.

The board was able to stay focused on its work because it was confident the crisis was being well managed. At the height of the pandemic, Incident Command was meeting three times a day for assessment and planning to adapt to the pandemic. The work of this group has increased and decreased based on the need, but Incident Command continues still as Reid Health works to address mandatory vaccinations of staff.



## Reid Health Case Brief: Key Board Takeaways

**The issue:** While COVID-19 brought many challenges, three that stood out for Reid Health were:

1. Helping community members feel safe enough to come in for care. People feared COVID and were avoiding entering the hospital setting, even for much-needed critical care.
2. Dealing with two polarizing problems: expenses were going up, while revenue was going down. Patient volume was significantly declining and there were increasing expenses due to the pandemic.
3. Addressing employee well-being and engagement. This was new territory for staff and they too were worried about being exposed to the virus. Many were also facing longer hours, staff shortages, and learning how to deal with new safety protocols and equipment.

**Steps taken:** Leadership at Reid Health immediately took action to address any hurdles that came up throughout the pandemic. For example, the system:

- Encouraged people to come back into the hospital and clinics by making the community aware of the precautions they were taking and their commitment to patient safety.
- Utilized CARES Act funding to remedy liquidity.
- Addressed the issues that were causing the most worry in physicians and staff. This included:
  - » Tackling staffing challenges
  - » Increasing safety protocols
  - » Offering childcare
  - » Providing meals

**Results to date:** During this time, Reid Health was able to provide high-quality care and successfully carry out its mission: “To lead our communities to well-being, one person at a time.”

To keep the organization on track, the board and senior leaders did not let these and other challenges get in the way of their strategic plans. They moved forward with growing the organization for the future—building out clinics into their communities to improve access for those they serve.

The board played a large role in leading Reid Health through the pandemic. It was well-equipped with a strong governance structure, best practices, and a healthy culture that made it ready to deal with the challenges at hand.



## **Strong Governance: A Key Factor in Their Success**

Governance played a key role in helping Reid Health through the pandemic. They were well equipped with a strong board ready to take on anything that came its way—even something as challenging as COVID-19.

The board values continuous governance improvement. Reid Health has been a Governance Institute member for over 30 years, and throughout that time they have regularly attended Governance Institute conferences. “This is a great opportunity for our board members,” Kinyon said. “Even if their business is being a banker, they learn a lot about healthcare plus their role in governance. They hear from a variety of speakers and rub elbows with other board members, CEOs, and physicians. It’s great socialization time for them, a time for them to hear what other people are thinking and see that everybody is going through the same struggles.” They can then bring that knowledge and experience back to their own organization.

They also conduct The Governance Institute’s BoardCompass® board self-assessment every year. They thoroughly review the results with the board and use those findings to establish board performance improvement goals. From that assessment they have increased the amount of time they spend on strategic discussions and quality issues at board meetings. The board now is intentional about setting “strategic discussion” agenda items and spends more than half of its meeting time discussing strategic issues, as opposed to hearing reports, and it devotes a significant amount of time to quality issues/discussion.

“We use a consent agenda during the meetings to allow more time for strategic discussions, which is very valuable for us,” Hilkert said. The consent agenda includes committee and management reports, meeting minutes, and other items the board has seen that don’t require additional discussion. They also have a robust committee structure with 10 committees that have clear charters and are well prepared to do the heavy lifting in those areas of expertise. This frees up the board’s workload while still ensuring they have the information needed to make sound decisions.

### **Best Practices Reid Health Utilizes for Governance Effectiveness:**

- Board members regularly participate in education that helps them fulfill the organization’s mission, vision, and strategic goals.
- The board conducts a board self-assessment every year and uses those results to set governance improvement goals.
- More than half of meeting time discussion is spent on strategic issues, as opposed to hearing reports.
- The board devotes a significant amount of time on its board meeting agenda to quality issues/discussion.
- The board uses a consent agenda to allow more time for important board topics.
- Committees are effectively utilized; they dig into the details for key issues and then report back to the board.

The board places a lot of value on community input. In addition to having board members from the community such as local bankers, business leaders, educators, physicians, and government officials, they also invite community members to join board committees. “This adds expertise to our committees, and these community members add valuable feedback on what’s important, what is going over well, and what the community needs or wants to hear about,” Hilkert said.

This has been especially helpful during COVID. For example, in the beginning of the pandemic, the hospital put out orange cones, yellow tape, and red signs as they restricted entries to specific locations. Many people saw this visual as a sign of danger and were afraid to come in. Speaking regularly with those in the community helped them realize the fear this was causing and allowed them to readjust their approach. “Having this committee structure gave us the opportunity to measure the pulse of the community,” Hilkert said. “We had a firsthand view from them that added to our decisions. It has really helped us get through the pandemic.”

Reid Health has a history of focusing on intentional governance and has developed a culture where the board is valued. “Our board members experience a feeling of satisfaction working on our board,” Hilkert said. “It’s structured in a way that they can make a big contribution. They can go home after a board meeting knowing they helped. They see the value of having Reid Health in our community, and they are happy to be able to give their time and effort to supporting that.”

While the pandemic has challenged leadership at a new level, the board and senior leaders at Reid Health are pleased with how they have navigated through this unique period in time. “I like to call what we have been through ‘the tale of two surges,’ with the first surge coming shortly after COVID arrived in our area and then the second surge we are in the midst of right now,” Kinyon said. “As a not-for-profit hospital, we measure ourselves on how well we are able to satisfy the health needs of the community we serve. If you look at our indicators for service and quality, we seemed to have fared pretty well through these two surges and through this whole pandemic and still been able to deliver quality care. It has really affected our organization, but we have been able to do, and survive, and complete our mission, so we are proud of that.”