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CASE STUDY:

## Stanly Regional Medical Center

### PREPARING A HOSPITAL AND COMMUNITY FOR CHANGE

The Board wanted to ensure that all stakeholders were ready to support the biggest change in the hospital's history.

#### The Situation

Consolidation in the U.S. healthcare system is ongoing and rapidly accelerating. From both a financial and health services position, the days of the independent hospital are numbered. Since entering into a management services agreement with Carolinas HealthCare System (CHS) several years earlier, the Stanly Regional Medical Center (SRMC) Board of Directors quickly recognized the advantages to the hospital and community of being affiliated with CHS. But given a history of community activism and a fear of losing its “hometown” identity, the Board wanted to ensure its administration, medical staff, the SRMC Foundation and the community at large were prepared for – and would ultimately support – the biggest change in the hospital's history.

#### The Work

Forge Communications designed and coordinated a multi-year program to help manage communications surrounding the Board's deliberations and decision. Our work included:

- Conducting community research into perceptions of SRMC and CHS.
- Developing the overarching communication strategy and positioning as the process moved forward.
- Creating a contingency plan mirroring potential Board action.
- Developing core messaging, statements, backgrounders, presentations and other supporting documents.
- Providing focused spokesperson coaching.
- Serving as liaison (when appropriate) between SRMC and CHS communications officials
- Providing on-the-ground support when the Board voted and announced SRMC would become part of CHS.



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### **The Outcomes**

Results from the process, which lasted nearly two years, exceeded the Board's and SRMC administration's expectations. The research program, comprising internal and external focus groups, revealed issues and perceptions of the hospital and CHS that helped guide development and implementation of the core messaging and overall strategy.

In the end, the Board's decision was received favorably in virtually all corners of the hospital and community. The SRMC medical staff praised the Board for inviting physician input, and stories in the local and regional media tracked SRMC's messaging nearly verbatim. Disruption to the hospital's operations and stakeholder relations was kept to an absolute minimum throughout the process.