
An aerial photograph of a large dam and reservoir. The dam is a long, curved concrete structure with multiple spillways. The water is dark blue, and the surrounding area is lush green with trees. There are some buildings and parking lots near the dam. The sky is clear and blue.

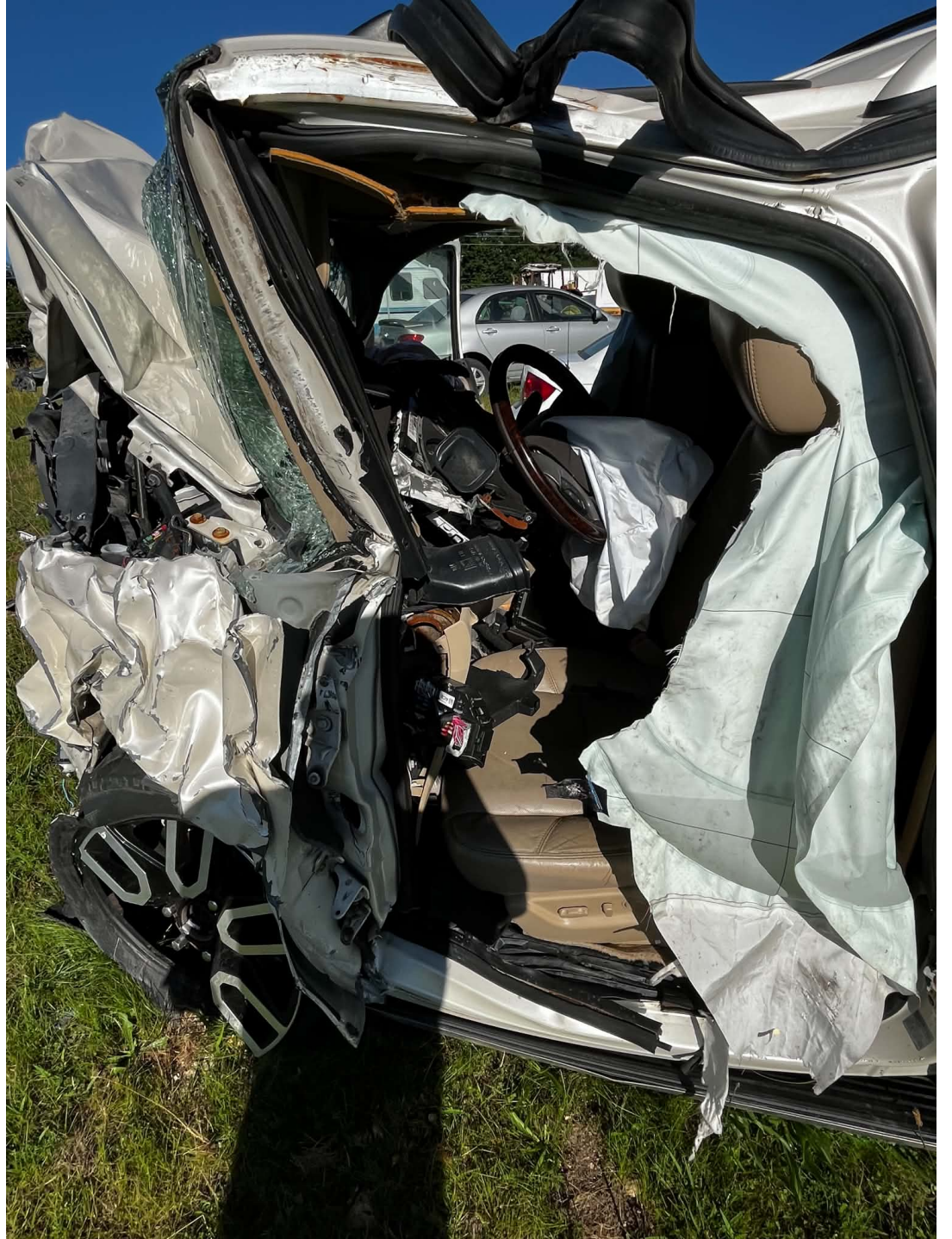
Rural Realities: Providing Critical Care Beyond the ICU

Molly Johnson, MD
Emergency Medicine and Critical Care
May 29, 2026

- I have no financial disclosures

GOALS

- **Explore realities of working in rural setting**
 - **Emergency physicians role**
 - **Systems and operational considerations**
- 
- A photograph of two hikers on a rocky mountain peak. One hiker, wearing a yellow jacket and a white helmet, is standing on a ledge and reaching out to help another hiker, who is wearing a red jacket and a red beanie, climb up. The background shows a cloudy sky and a rocky mountain slope.





Only 16% of nurses work in rural hospitals.

Rural: 64.1 nurses per 10,000 people

Urban: 97.9 per 10,000 people

K KFF Health News

[A 'Barbaric' Problem in American Hospitals Is Only Getting Bigger](#)

Patients are getting stuck in the emergency department for days while waiting for a spot in an inpatient ward.

1 month ago



F Forbes

[ER Boarding Is Making Patients Sicker, Study Finds](#)

Each additional hour of boarding was associated with a 0.8% increase in the risk of early deterioration. For patients who deteriorated while...

Mar 26, 2026



S STAT

[Exposed and invisible in an ER hallway bed](#)

Emergency department hallway beds have transformed the patient examination into a moral dilemma, leaving people exposed physically and...

Mar 18, 2026



No specialist?





Tools every EM physician should keep sharp



Tools every rural EM physician should keep sharp

- Ventilator management
- Refractory shock management
- Ultrasound skills
- Difficult airway rescue
- Resource allocation
- Family discussions in uncertain prognosis
- Resuscitation skills for all ages

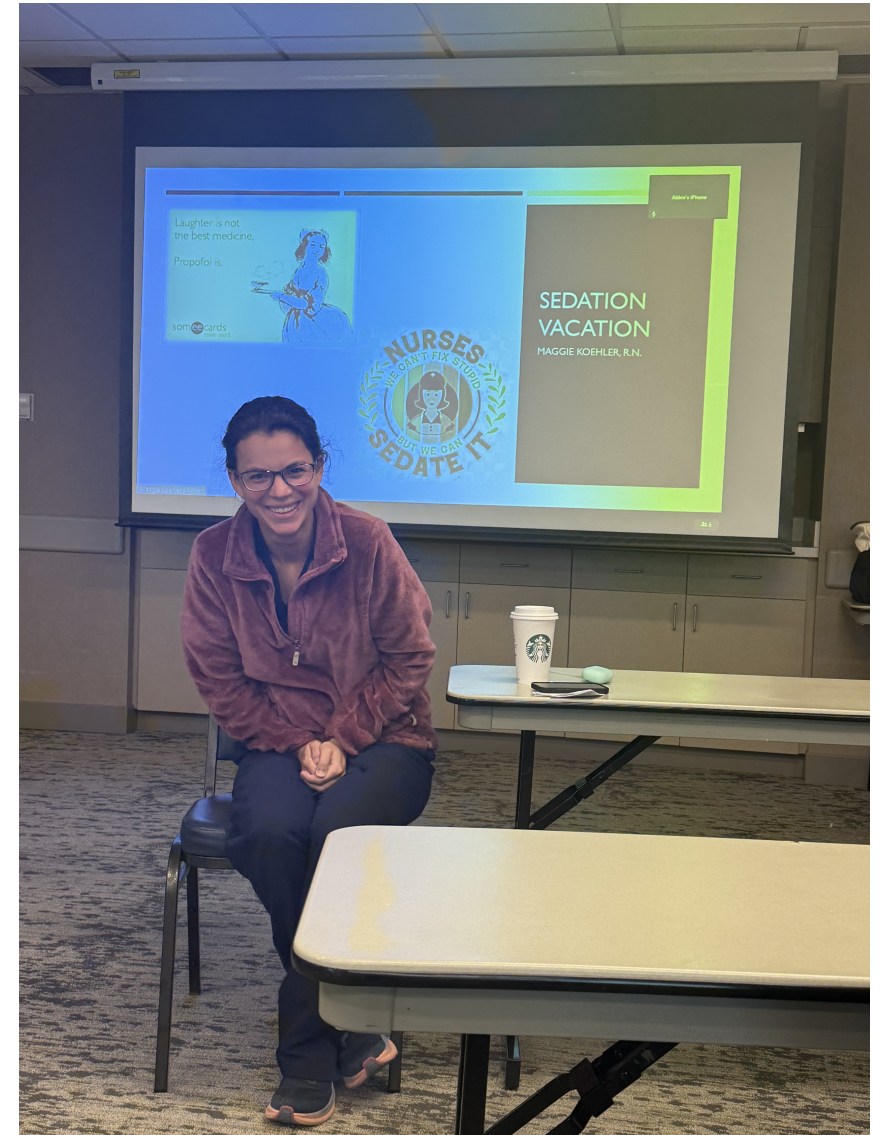


Systems and Operations Considerations



Nursing Education and Protocols

- Simulation for rare scenarios
- Bedside teaching and coaching
- Protocols for critical diseases with frequent monitoring necessary



Things to know/ask

- How much blood is on hand?
- Who responds to in house codes?
- How many operating rooms are available and will the general surgeons perform damage control operation if needed?
- What EMS operations are available? How long are transport times

When to switch focus?





Final Tho

Rural emergency m
becoming more co
hours or even days

or transfer. It's
critical care for





Questions

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Resources

- Arredondo K, Witte L, Paterson-Roberts A, Caloudas A, Vincenti M, Watts BV, Sutherland B, Touchett H. Strengthening Rural Health Care: A Scoping Review of Nurse Recruitment and Retention Strategies. *Med Care*. 2026 Jan 1;64(1S Suppl 1):S18-S25. doi: 10.1097/MLR.0000000000002202. Epub 2025 Aug 25. PMID: 41359985; PMCID: PMC12685317.
- Rural veterans: FY2021-2023. National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Accessed December 13, 2024. <https://www.data.va.gov/stories/s/Rural-Veterans-FY2021-2023/kkh2-eymp/>.