

From Planning to Activation: Opening a Trauma Center in Fremont, California

On July 1, 2024, Washington Hospital and Healthcare System in Fremont, California, opened its doors as a provisional Level II trauma center. EMS agencies began bringing injured patients within the first hour of opening, and by the end of the first year the trauma program had entered over 2300 patients into the trauma registry.

It is a daunting endeavor to open a new trauma center, and to move from a non-trauma hospital to a trauma center is a radical change for staff and the community. That change did not happen overnight.



From the beginning, Washington Hospital maximized consultant support to plan, prepare, and launch the trauma program, especially in the early phase before the Trauma Program Manager (TPM) and Trauma Medical Director (TMD) were hired. They hired Bishop+Associates, a trauma consulting firm with 40 years in the field, which included a subcontract to Sarah Spilman with **Diligent Consulting** for project management and operational leadership. From the earliest planning stages through opening day, Sarah worked closely with hospital leadership, physicians, and frontline staff to build the clinical, operational, and regulatory processes required for trauma services.

Work began with a comprehensive assessment of Washington Hospital's existing emergency, surgical, inpatient, and support service capabilities to identify the people, processes, and infrastructure needed to meet American College of Surgeons (ACS) trauma standards. Based on those findings, we engaged key stakeholders and developed a detailed roadmap to guide the hospital through every phase of readiness. This included facility and equipment planning, trauma program development, staffing and physician coverage strategies, development and implementation of policies, staff education, information

"The consultants were exceptional in helping us develop our Level II Trauma Center. Building a trauma program from scratch is a huge challenge, but their coordinated and hands-on approach helped us systematically plan, develop, educate, and implement trauma care in our hospital. Throughout the project, Sarah served not only as an advisor, but also as an integral part of our team. Any healthcare facility involved in trauma care would benefit from Sarah's expertise and collaborative spirit."

Terri Hunter
Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer

technology (IT) integrations, and performance improvement (PI) processes aligned with state and national standards.

A major focus of the project was helping the organization establish the systems and coordination necessary to support trauma care around the clock. Hospital staff knew how to care for injured patients, but it was a big lift to prepare departments and staff for the immediate readiness required to care for the sickest of trauma patients. Consultants helped facilitate physician engagement, staff education, and mock surveys to ensure teams were prepared for the County's provisional site reviews and real-world patient scenarios.

Opening a new trauma center presented significant challenges:

- Aligning multiple departments around new clinical pathways while maintaining day-to-day operations
- Securing consistent 24/7 specialty on-call coverage
- Recruiting new trauma program leadership and staff
- Building workflows that connected the ambulance bay and helipad, emergency department, imaging suites, laboratory, blood bank, operating rooms, intensive care, inpatient floors, and transfer services.
- Building a new trauma registry, adding order sets and note templates to the electronic medical record, and preparing all equipment and technology for trauma patients
- Implementing new PI processes and developing a collaborative hospital PI culture
- Meeting an aggressive timeline for designation (2.5 years)

Successfully launching the program required disciplined project management, strong leadership alignment, and continuous collaboration across clinical and operational teams.

Because of hospital staff's commitment and effort, along with consultant support, Washington Hospital successfully opened its provisional trauma center on schedule, with the systems, staffing, and processes in place to deliver timely, coordinated trauma care. The new program strengthens the hospital's emergency capabilities and improves access to critical services for southern Alameda County.

The First Year by the Numbers:

Number of Trauma Admissions: 1143

Top-Level Activations: 123

Rate of Transfers Out: 4%

It is expected to take a full five years to move from planning to full verification. Washington Hospital received provisional designation in June 2024, hosted the ACS for a consultation visit in Fall 2025, and expects to be fully verified and designated in Summer 2027.

Diligent Consulting

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