



Northeast Georgia Health System

Chief, Cardiothoracic Surgery

Leadership Profile

November 2025

Prepared by Imran Ali, Kyle Wiederhold, Wendy Kerschner

WittKieffer

Contents

The Opportunity	01
Opportunities and Expectations of Leadership	02
Organization Overview	03
Position Summary	10
Candidate Qualifications	11
The Community	12
Procedure for Candidacy	13

The Opportunity

Northeast Georgia Health System (NGHS) seeks an accomplished and forward-thinking surgical leader to serve as the Chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery and lead the program to best in class nationally.

NGHS is a not-for-profit integrated health system dedicated to improving the health and well-being of communities across Northeast Georgia. With over 1000 beds across five hospital campuses and a medical staff of over 1,400 representing more than 60 specialties, NGHS is recognized for its exceptional clinical quality and patient-centered care. The organization attracts highly skilled professionals who share a commitment to advancing health outcomes and fostering innovation across the region.

At the heart of NGHS's clinical program is the Georgia Heart Institute (GHI), a comprehensive, multidisciplinary program encompassing the full spectrum of heart and vascular care. The Institute's 134 physicians, surgeons, advanced practitioners, and nurses collaborate deeply across cardiology, cardiothoracic surgery, and vascular surgery to provide seamless, evidence-based care. GHI is defined by a culture of interdependence, research, and innovation, with state-of-the-art technologies and a recently established cardiology fellowship program that reinforces its mission to deliver exceptional clinical care and train the next generation of cardiology leaders.

The Chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery will provide operational, clinical, and quality leadership for all cardiothoracic surgery practices within Northeast Georgia Physicians Group (NGPG) through the GHI and Thoracic Oncology service lines across the NGHS system. Reporting to the Chief Clinical Officer, the Chief will partner closely with executive team of NGPG, Medical Affairs, and the Administrative Directors. The Chief will oversee clinical services within GHI and thoracic oncology service line, drive alignment with NGHS's mission, and ensure the delivery of high-quality, efficient, and cost-effective care. This leader will establish annual performance goals, uphold program-specific accreditation standards, and promote evidence-based best practices to enhance outcomes, safety, and patient satisfaction.

This role calls for a seasoned cardiac surgeon with demonstrated experience in leading and building high-performing programs and teams. The ideal candidate will be clinically skilled and possess credibility to set and enforce expectations while fostering a culture of accountability and collaboration. Strong strategic and operational acumen, particularly in programmatic development, quality and safety, and cultural alignment, is essential. The ability to manage diverse personalities, uphold fairness in block time and case posting, and ensure consistent quality will be critical to success.

Above all, the Chief must embody a balanced and compassionate leadership style, combining approachability and respect with clear expectations and accountability. This leader will strengthen collaboration across service lines, particularly with cardiology, anesthesia, and vascular surgery, pulmonology and oncology, recognizing cardiothoracic surgery as one essential component of a larger ecosystem. By elevating clinical excellence with operational rigor and team-based collaboration, the Chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of heart care across Northeast Georgia.

Opportunities and Expectations of Leadership

The following represent key opportunities and expectations for the Chief of Cardiothoracic Surgery to address within the first 18 to 24 months of their tenure. They are not listed in order of significance.

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic environment of NGHS, NGPG, and GHI. Build relationships across the System with operational and clinical leaders and form partnerships with other specialties.
- Establish oneself as a credible leader, clinician, and communicator across the System and serve as an advocate.
- Further integrate cardiovascular surgery to promote unified systems of care across the inpatient and ambulatory settings across the System. Enhance the partnership with Cardiology and the Chief Cardiology Officer to ensure a multidisciplinary approach, alignment, and strong communication.
- Recruit highly qualified surgeons and anticipate future recruitment needs as patient volumes increase. Establish an environment where all surgeons and staff feel they are integral to the division's success.
- Elevate the program's standing as a regional and national leader. Ensure CT surgery's competitive advantage in cardiac surgical care while continuing to be at the forefront of providing leading-edge surgical procedures.
- Foster a culture for CT Surgery that promotes physician and staff development and satisfaction while maintaining high standards of professional practice and a culture of accountability.
- Heighten the market presence of CT surgery through the strengthening of existing external affiliations, growth of new geographic markets, as well as the delivery of clinical innovation.
- Strengthen the program's quality, outcomes, process measures, and clinical protocols that continue to advance NGHS and GHI's leadership in this space. Plan and implement continuous improvement initiatives aligned with organizational goals. Work to ensure evidence-based clinical care across thoracic and cardiovascular surgery that demonstrates clinical outcomes characterized as best practices when objectively measured against national benchmarks.
- Further integrate cardiothoracic surgery with management and growth of the Thoracic Oncology service line.
- Lead and manage the role of Cardiothoracic Surgery in GME within the General Surgery and Cardiology GME programs.

Organization Overview

Northeast Georgia Health System

Northeast Georgia Health System was established in 1951 as what was then known as Hall County Hospital, which initially had 90 beds. The local newspaper predicted the beds would never be filled. Fast forward to today, and NGHS is the largest and fastest-growing healthcare organization in the state that's not headquartered in Atlanta.

The nearly \$3 billion health system now has more than 12,000 employees who care for a service area of more than 5,000 square miles, is home to more than 1 million people, and includes:

- 5 hospitals, including one of only five Level I Trauma Centers in Georgia.
- 1,400+ unified medical staff members.
- 700+ employed providers through Northeast Georgia Physicians Group, the sixth-largest employed, multispecialty group in the state.
- 100+ employed providers through the Georgia Heart Institute, a cardiology program with a history of being recognized as the best in the state.
- 200+ physician learners across 7 residency programs and 5 fellowship programs.
- 10 urgent care centers.
- 7 ambulatory physical, occupational, and speech rehabilitation locations.
- 3 ambulatory imaging centers.
- 3 long-term care centers.
- 2 ambulatory cancer centers.
- 1 inpatient behavioral health facility.

NGHS collaborates with rural hospitals throughout its service area, as well as facilities in the suburbs and exurbs of the Metro Atlanta area. It serves one of the fastest-growing regions in the nation, where it is the market leader across virtually all adult acute care specialties and services. The flagship hospital, Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) in Gainesville, has historically been the main tertiary referral hospital for the entire region, enjoying a dominant market share throughout its history. However, as NGHS and its service area have grown rapidly during the past decade, competition for profitable services has intensified in key areas with an attractive payor mix.

Northeast Georgia Physician Group

Northeast Georgia Physicians Group (NGPG) is the physician employment arm of NGHS that brings together over 650 talented physicians, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, midwives, and other clinical staff at more than 95 locations across North Georgia.

Cardiothoracic Surgery

Housed within NGPG, Cardiovascular & Thoracic Surgery (CT Surgery) provides leading surgical care for conditions affecting the heart, lungs, diaphragm, and great vessels. The team currently includes five highly skilled cardiovascular and thoracic surgeons who bring expertise in innovative techniques to achieve exceptional patient outcomes. Whether performing minimally invasive, robotic-assisted, or open-heart surgery, the team offers the full spectrum of surgical options tailored to each patient's individual needs and anatomy.

Surgeons at NGPG specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of conditions involving the heart, lungs, , diaphragm, and great vessels.

CT surgeons treat a wide range of disease etiologies. This treatment is supported by a comprehensive range of advanced surgical options. These options include:

- Open and Robotic Coronary Artery Bypass Grafting (CABG)
- Minimally Invasive Vein Harvesting for CABG
- Open and Robotic Heart Valve Surgery
- Robotic Thoracic Surgery:
- Cardiac Ablations Including Maze Procedure for Atrial Fibrillation
- Robotic Structural Heart Surgery Including Septal Myectomy

Surgical Volumes

Procedure	Volume	Robotic
CABG	335	50
CABG with Valve Surgery	30	-
Stand-alone Valve Surgery	90	50
Aorta Procedures	20	-
Thoracic Procedures	220	170
Other Surgical Procedures	200	12
Structural Heart/TAVR	345	-

Georgia Heart Institute Service Line

Georgia Heart Institute (GHI) is the state's most forward-thinking heart and vascular program. The Georgia Heart Institute is a comprehensive, multidisciplinary heart and vascular program of Northeast Georgia Health System. With personalized care provided for the complete spectrum of cardiovascular conditions, GHI is saving and improving lives for generations.

Committed to excellence in clinical care, education, and research, the GHI Service Line is comprised of 45 cardiologists, five cardiothoracic surgeons, six vascular surgeons, and 78 advanced practice providers who provide comprehensive care across a spectrum of heart and vascular diseases.

Physicians practice in facilities equipped with state-of-the-art technology and advanced medical equipment, such as hybrid operating rooms and advanced imaging suites, which offer minimally invasive procedures for one of only two robotic cardiac programs in Georgia. They are also enrolled in over 40 leading-edge clinical and device trials.

Committed to developing the next generation of leaders, GHI is home to the second-largest cardiovascular disease fellowship program in the state of Georgia. The program offers six positions annually, and fellows receive innovative and comprehensive training opportunities, including research experiences. There are also 30+ General Surgery residents that rotate for thoracic and CT Surgery experience.

Vision and Approach

Built on a foundation of expertise and innovation, GHI is focused on creating healthier tomorrows for everyone. First and foremost, GHI believes this starts with a dedication to supporting the complete individual and providing the highest level of care when it matters most.

The team at GHI strives to provide an unmatched level of heart and vascular care that supports patients and their families for a lifetime. With experienced cardiologists, renowned surgeons, and highly trained specialists, GHI strives to do whatever it takes to keep patients' hearts at their healthiest.

History

GHI's journey began in 1957, when Drs. Sam Poole and Dick Stribling were recruited to NGMC to launch Heart & Vascular Services. From there, things quickly progressed, with the first diagnostic cardiac cath performed in 1984 and the first interventional procedure and open-heart surgery in 2002. Then, in 2014, The Heart Center of NGMC, a private cardiology group, officially became a part of the Northeast Georgia Health System (NGHS) family.

Over the last several years, growth and innovation have continued, with the first cardiac intervention performed in Braselton in 2018. NGHS became the first health system in Georgia with hospitals accredited as Emergency Cardiac Care Centers.

Most recently, many of the system's cardiology services were provided through The Heart Center of NGMC. As a long-standing and trusted practice within the community, NGHS has evolved its program into the Georgia Heart Institute in 2022, connecting cardiology, CT Surgery, and Vascular Surgery into a comprehensive service line.

Centers

With a robust team of experts spanning nearly every specialty of cardiology, cardiothoracic surgery, and vascular surgery, GHI is proud to offer patients a truly comprehensive care experience. Not only does this ensure that they have an expert who specializes in diagnosing and treating each patient's unique heart needs, but their care also has the backing of a multi-disciplinary, collaborative team.

- [Center for Cardiovascular Prevention, Metabolism and Lipids](#)
- [Center for Complex Coronary Disease](#)
- [Heart Failure Treatment & Recovery Center](#)
- [Structural Heart Center](#)
- [Women's Heart Center](#)
- [Resistant Hypertension Center](#)
- [Clinical and Device Trials](#)

NORTHEAST GEORGIA HEALTH SYSTEM AT A GLANCE



Who We Are

Northeast Georgia Health System (NGHS) is on a mission of improving the health of our community in all we do.

Our team cares for more than one million people across the region through five hospitals and a variety of outpatient locations. Led by volunteer boards made up of community leaders, NGHS is a not-for-profit health system – so all revenue beyond operating costs is returned to the community through improved services and innovative programs.

BY THE NUMBERS*

NGHS
Total Visits
1.6 million+

Georgia Heart
Institute Visits
109,000+

Inpatient
Discharges
51,500+

Licensed
Beds (total)
1,026

NGPG Visits
1 million+

Emergency Visits
227,000+

Completed
Virtual Visits
66,000+

Surgeries
31,000+

Deliveries
5,800+

INVESTED IN OUR COMMUNITY*

Employees
12,000+

Economic Impact
7.8 billion+
(2023)

Charity Care
\$76 million+
(2023)

NGMC
Medical Staff
1,500+

*2024 Fiscal Year - October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024 unless otherwise noted

HOSPITALS



NGMC Gainesville

- 629 licensed beds
- 28 operating rooms
- Intensive Care Unit (ICU)
- Level I Trauma Center & Emergency Services
- Women & Children's Pavilion
- Level III Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU)
- Wound Healing Center

743 Spring Street NE, Gainesville, GA 30501
770-219-9000 | nghs.com/gainesville



NGMC Braselton

- 236 licensed beds
- 7 operating rooms
- ICU
- Labor & Delivery Services
- Level II NICU
- Interventional Cardiac Cath Lab
- Emergency Services

1400 River Place, Braselton, GA 30517
770-848-8000 | nghs.com/braselton



NGMC Barrow

- 56 licensed beds
- 3 operating rooms
- Intermediate Care Unit
- Wound Healing Center
- Emergency Services

316 N. Broad Street
Winder, GA 30680
770-867-3400
nghs.com/barrow



NGMC Lumpkin

- 52 licensed beds
- 4 operating rooms
- Virtual specialty care
- Emergency Services

495 GA 400
Dahlonega, GA 30533
770-219-9000
nghs.com/lumpkin



NGMC Habersham

- 53 licensed beds
- 5 operating rooms
- Virtual specialty care
- Labor & Delivery Services
- Emergency Services

541 Historic Hwy #441-N
Demorest, GA 30535
706-754-2161
nghs.com/habersham

Northeast Georgia Physicians Group (NGPG)

- 700+ physicians, advanced practice professionals and clinical staff
- 50+ locations
- 11 Urgent Care locations
- 40+ specialties

770-219-8400 | ngpg.org

Georgia Heart Institute

- 120+ physicians and advanced practice professionals
- 14+ locations

770-534-2020 | georgiaheartinstitute.org

Imaging Centers

Braselton, Buford, Dawsonville and Gainesville; plus NGMC Gainesville, Barrow, Braselton and Habersham
nghs.com/imaging

Rehabilitation Services

Braselton, Buford, Cleveland, Dahlonega, Dawsonville, Demorest and Gainesville
nghs.com/rehab

Long Term Care Centers

Two locations in Gainesville and one location in Demorest
nghs.com/long-term-care

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment Center

One location in Gainesville
nghs.com/laurelwood

Cancer Services

Accessible at Braselton Cancer Center & Toccoa Cancer Center; plus NGMC Braselton and Gainesville
nghs.com/cancer

Accreditations & Recognition

nghs.com/recognition

- Named state's best community hospital by U.S. News & World Report
- Fully accredited by DNV Healthcare
- MBSAQIP-Accredited Center for Bariatric Surgery and Obesity Medicine
- Accreditation with Commendation by the American College of Surgeons Commission on Cancer
- Accredited for carotid artery stenting and percutaneous coronary interventions by Accreditation for Cardiovascular Excellence
- Hospice Honors Elite accreditation
- Comprehensive Joint Replacement program through Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
- Comprehensive Stroke Center – Gainesville Primary Stroke Center – Barrow, Braselton and Habersham
- Emergency Cardiac Care Center Designations for all five hospitals
- Center of Excellence Designation from the Surgical Review Corporation – Colorectal Surgery, Minimally Invasive Surgery, Minimally Invasive Gynecology, Robotic Surgery and Hernia Surgery

Graduate Medical Education (GME)

200+ resident physicians and fellows train under experienced and passionate faculty, with the goal of becoming the next generation of physician leaders. ngmcgme.org

SPECIALTIES

Emergency Medicine | Family Medicine | General Surgery | Internal Medicine | Psychiatry | Transitional Year

FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMS

Cardiovascular Disease | Hospice and Palliative Medicine | Pulmonary & Critical Care Medicine

Careers

- Named one of America's Best-In-State Employers by Forbes for the state of Georgia
- Named one of Atlanta Business Chronicle's Healthiest Employers.

Learn more about new career opportunities at nghs.com/careers.



OUR MISSION:
*improving the health of our
community in all we do*

OUR VISION

We will be the preferred and indispensable healthcare resource for the communities we serve.

OUR CORE VALUES

RESPECTFUL COMPASSION
I impact life's most sacred moments.

RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP
What I do today ensures tomorrow.

DEEP INTERDEPENDENCE
I can't do my job without you.

PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE
I bring my best every day.

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

Show Vulnerability

Display Empathy

Demonstrate Courage

Demonstrate Radical Listening

Promote Teamwork

Hold Others Accountable

Strive For Continuous Improvement



Position Summary

The Chief will report directly to the System Chief Clinical Officer and will work closely with the Chief Cardiology Officer and administrative leadership to coordinate clinical services related to cardiothoracic surgery and related programs. Working closely with administrative leadership and clinician leaders, the medical director will establish annual performance goals for the program, aligning them with the vision and mission of Northeast Georgia Health System.

In partnership with NGHS directors, the Chief will be accountable for all efforts to ensure the consistent delivery of high-quality, efficient, and cost-effective patient care for the cardiothoracic surgery program and will also be responsible for promoting best practices through evidence-based medicine. The medical director will ensure that the surgical practices meet established goals, including but not limited to cardiac and thoracic surgery program-specific accreditation standards, patient safety, access, revenue cycle management, patient satisfaction, and other clinical performance objectives.

Reporting Relationships

Reports to: Chief Clinical Officer, Northeast Georgia Health System

Key Relationships: Chief Cardiology Officer
Vice President, NGPG
NGHS System Leadership
GHI Service Line Governance

The Chief is responsible for physicians and advanced practitioners within the practices, specifically in the area of cardiothoracic surgery.

Responsibilities

- Working with executive leadership sets the strategic vision for the cardiothoracic surgery program. Identifies opportunities to advance care optimization and coordination, thereby fulfilling the organizational mission.
- Maintains an active clinical practice, serving as an outcomes-oriented and exemplary surgeon.
- Provides leadership for the development, review, and strategic implementation of standardized metrics of financial, clinical quality, and personnel performance.
- Assists in the development of policies and procedures applicable to ambulatory, acute care, and surgical practices, with the approval of such policies to be pursued as may be necessary in accordance with NGHS/NGPG standards, as well as work to secure clinician compliance with these policies.
- Oversees the evaluation and management of assigned clinical practices as well as adherence to established policies and procedures.
- Maintains a collaborative provider environment that emphasizes engagement, teamwork, quality, and productivity.
- Works closely and meets regularly with the NGHS Medical Director of Perioperative Services to improve OR efficiency and improve the delivery of cardiac and thoracic surgery services.
- Advocates and represents the CT Surgery Program within GHI, Thoracic Oncology Service Lines and the health system and externally.

- Assists in the professional development and growth of physicians through mentoring and identifying appropriate educational resources.
- Role in overseeing the role of CT Surgery in GME with General Surgery and Cardiology

Candidate Qualifications

Education/Certifications

- Doctor of Medicine from an accredited School of Medicine and Board Certification through the American Board of Thoracic Surgery.
- Eligible for licensure in Georgia.

Knowledge and Work Experience

- Minimum of 10 years of experience in Cardiothoracic surgery.
- Medical staff leadership experience preferred.
- Training in clinical quality improvement or physician leadership preferred..
- Active participation in national organizations in cardiothoracic surgical specialty preferred.
- Experience as a medical director or service line leader required.

Personal Characteristics and Experiences

- Demonstrates the highest levels of integrity, ethics, and credibility, serving as a trusted role model for colleagues, staff, and patients.
- Combines confidence with approachability, fostering open communication, trust, and engagement across the organization.
- Exhibits strong emotional intelligence and self-awareness, effectively navigating complex interpersonal and organizational dynamics.
- Maintains resilience under pressure, adapting to change and guiding teams through challenging situations with steadiness and clarity.
- Thinks strategically and visionary, identifying opportunities to advance the program, enhance clinical excellence, and strengthen regional and national reputation.
- Inspires, mentors, and develops high-performing teams, fostering accountability, professional growth, and collaboration.
- Embraces a collaborative, multidisciplinary approach, building strong partnerships across service lines including cardiology, anesthesia, vascular surgery, and structural heart.
- Drives measurable results with a focus on quality, safety, efficiency, patient outcomes, and operational performance.
- Makes decisive, well-informed decisions, balancing clinical judgment with operational priorities and organizational goals.
- Champions a culture of patient-centered care, transparency, continuous improvement, and innovation throughout the program and health system. Committed to continuous learning and staying abreast of emerging trends, technologies, and best practices in cardiothoracic surgery.
- Maintains empathy and a patient-focused mindset while enforcing accountability and high professional standards across the team.

The Community

Northeast Georgia

Northeast Georgia offers an outstanding quality of life, with Atlanta less than an hour away and nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. We offer the perfect blend of excitement and relaxation.

Lake Sidney Lanier surrounds the landscape, adding beauty and offering great opportunities for boating, waterskiing, swimming, rowing, and fishing. The mountains are filled with hiking paths and sections of the Appalachian Trail, arts and craft festivals, camping sites, and other tourist magnets that draw people from throughout the Southeastern US.

Our K-12 schools, both public and private, offer exceptional education in caring environments that are integrated with the community through strong corporate support (Partners in Education) and effective Parent/Teacher teamwork. If golf is your game, we have beautiful courses for your enjoyment.

The housing market continues to thrive, thanks in great part to the lake and the booming economic environment. Beautiful townhomes accent our downtown areas, while elegant lake homes, estate lots, neighborhoods, and farms round out possibilities for executives and their families.

Please visit the following sites for additional information:

[Gainesville, GA | Official Website](#)

[Hall County, GA | Official Website](#)

[Gainesville | Official Georgia Tourism & Travel Website | Explore Georgia.org](#)

[Greater Hall Chamber of Commerce](#)

[Living in Gainesville Georgia](#)

[Living Here - Northeast Georgia Health System](#)



Procedure for Candidacy

All applications, nominations, and inquiries are invited. Applications should include a CV/resume. Review of applications has begun and will continue until the position is filled.

Please direct all applications, nominations, and inquiries to the WittKieffer consultants assisting Northeast Georgia Health System with this recruitment via e-mail to Wendy Kerschner at wkerschner@wittkieffer.com. All inquiries, applications, and nominations will be held in the highest confidence.

Northeast Georgia Health System values diversity and is committed to equal opportunity for all persons regardless of age, color, disability, ethnicity, marital status, national origin, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, veteran status, or any other status protected by law.

The material presented in this leadership profile should be relied on for informational purposes only. This material has been copied, compiled, or quoted in part from Northeast Georgia Health System documents and personal interviews and is believed to be reliable. While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of this information, the original source documents and factual situations govern.

All images and logos used in this leadership profile were attained from Northeast Georgia Health System and/or are owned by Witt/Kieffer Inc. via Getty Images.



WittKieffer is the premier executive search and advisory firm developing inclusive, impactful leadership teams for organizations that improve quality of life. For more than 50 years, we have operated exclusively at the intersection of not-for-profit and for-profit healthcare delivery, science, and education – the Quality of Life Ecosystem. Through our expert executive search services as well as our Professional Search, Interim Leadership, and Leadership Advisory solutions, we strengthen organizations that make the world better.

Visit [WittKieffer.com](https://www.WittKieffer.com) to learn more.

WittKieffer