

General Practice Solutions

A Quarterly Newsletter from the GPSC

Collaboration on Physician Office Integration program closes gaps in care

In a tight-knit community like Maple Ridge, good news travels fast. Faster than Dr Ken Burns expected. Dr Burns, a family physician and chair of the Ridge Meadows Division of Family Practice, had just delivered a healthy baby boy at his local hospital and was eager to share the news with his medical staff. By the time Dr Burns arrived back at his clinic, his staff were already aware of the birth; they'd received the patient's updated electronic medical record (EMR) information from the hospital moments after the baby was born.

The timely transmission of Dr Burns' patient information to his EMR is a result of the Fraser Health Authority's Physician Office Integration (POI) project. It's designed to send a secure, real-time transmission of a hospitalized patient's treatment and status – including admission, discharge, nursing, lab, pharmacy, and diagnostic imaging results. The transmission goes directly from the hospital to the family physician's EMR.

Supported by the Ridge Meadows Division, Dr Burns was one of the first family physicians to trial the project when it was launched in February 2012. "Previously, there was no connection between computers from the hospital to our local offices. The time lag was huge, which resulted in gaps in care," said Dr Burns. "I was willing to try anything to improve communication and coordination in both acute and community care."

For divisions in the Fraser Valley region, the Collaborative Services Committee (CSC) meetings provided the opportunity to: share concerns about gaps between acute and primary care, identify a core group of physicians to work with the health authority, and contribute to POI.

Doug Barton, senior consultant of knowledge management and business systems at Fraser Health, credits physicians with helping to design the POI system. "We recognized that it was crucial to engage family physicians in this process. We held forums where they voiced the need to decrease paperwork and increase timely communication with local hospitals," said Barton. "For future considerations, we are also investigating ways to implement a two-way transfer of information so that physicians would have the option to send patient information to the hospital," added Barton.

Strengthening quality of care and increasing practice efficiency are key areas that the Ridge Meadows Division aims to improve in their community. "Our members can sign up for POI using Profile, Intrahealth's EMR program, through the Division and use it themselves," noted Dr Burns.

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BCMA President and BC Health Minister applaud Child and Youth Mental Health module

The Practice Support Program (PSP) Child and Youth Mental Health module has garnered praise from BCMA President Dr Shelley Ross and Health Minister Dr Margaret MacDiarmid.

In a mid-November announcement to media, Ross and MacDiarmid spoke of the importance of this newest PSP module that is enabling BC family physicians to better treat mental health disorders in youth and children.

"Children suffering from mild to moderate anxiety, depression, and ADHD are often difficult to diagnose. In addition to their own suffering, they are often stigmatized and alienated by peers in their communities and schools," said Ross. "With this new program, family physicians will be able to better identify and manage problems early on, while working with community partners to provide a 'wrap-around' system of care that goes beyond the doctor's office."

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Currently the POI system supports Profile, but according to Dr John Hamilton, medical director of primary care and Aboriginal health at Fraser Health, the ultimate goal of POI is to support all EMRs used by physicians in the Fraser community. "We are continuously working to improve the systems that support the patient-primary care provider relationship," said Dr Hamilton.

There are currently 90 physicians and 26 clinics using POI in the Fraser Valley, including the Ridge Meadows, Langley, and White Rock-South Surrey Divisions of Family Practice.

"In the past, I never felt comfortable giving up paper copies, but I'm confident in the high privacy and security standards of POI. I've now shut the paper off and it feels wonderful," added Dr Burns.

Did you know?

For physicians not currently on an EMR, the Physician Information Technology Office (PITO) provides hands-on support in preparing and implementing an EMR and reimburses 70% of eligible physician costs.

Learn more about the development and implementation of standardized systems of EMRs in British Columbia through PITO at www.pito.bc.ca.

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With the emphasis on non-drug treatments first, the module provides family physicians with evidence-based tools to help them identify, assess, and treat mental health disorders such as mild to moderate anxiety, ADHD, and depression in younger patients. Physicians work in partnership with families to provide appropriate assessment, treatment, and support and the program also supports specialist physicians, school counselors, and local child and youth mental health clinicians to enhance their ability to work together to address mental health issues in youth.

"As a family doctor, I recognize the challenges of caring for young patients living with mental health challenges and it is great news that this program will help provide additional tools to support our youngest patients in a safe and familiar environment," said Dr MacDiarmid. "This training addresses an important need and is a great example of the work we are doing in partnership with the BCMA."

To date, about 100 family doctors have participated in the module alongside pediatricians, psychiatrists, child and youth mental health clinicians, and school counselors.

The Child and Youth Mental Health module was developed by the PSP in partnership with Dr Stan Kutcher, an internationally-renowned expert in adolescent mental health, Drs Jana Davidson and Jane Garland of BC Children's Hospital, and with input from psychiatric specialists, pediatricians, school counselors, and staff of the provincial ministries of both education and children and family development.

Visit www.pspbca.ca for more information.

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General Practice Solutions is produced by the General Practice Services Committee, a joint committee of the British Columbia Ministry of Health and the British Columbia Medical Association.

Formed under the 2002 Agreement between BC's doctors and the provincial government, the GPSC is responsible for developing and implementing strategies that support improvements in primary care.

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