

General Practice Solutions

A Quarterly Newsletter from the GPSC

Advanced Access means family doctor can see patients right away leading to fewer visits to emergency room

If you have a pressing medical issue and can't get in to see your family doctor, you'll most likely go to a walk-in clinic or your nearest emergency room. One doctor in Powell River is taking positive action to deal with this challenge. Dr Danielle Marentette's family practice clinic has adopted a new appointment scheduling system so that patients can get into the office on the same day they call for an appointment.

Marentette has adopted the Advanced Access system, a new way of scheduling appointments so that patients can more easily be seen at the time they prefer and, if necessary, on the same day. For busy practices, Advanced Access scheduling also helps eliminate backlogged appointments and enables more patient visits throughout the day.

Advanced Access scheduling is one of the practice innovations popularized by the Practice Support Program (PSP), a training and support program for physicians and their medical office assistants (MOAs) designed to improve clinical and practice management and to support enhanced delivery of patient care.

Marentette had taken over a large practice where patients had to wait weeks for appointments. She was also providing maternity care so would sometimes have to shut the office without notice and reschedule patients. With her own maternity leave looming, she wanted flexibility and predictability for herself and her patients. Advanced Access scheduling fit the bill.

She and her MOA took part in the PSP's Advanced Access learning module and put the new system in place a year ago. "Now we pre-book about 30% of appointments, with certain procedures or a full physical, etc. booking up to two weeks ahead," she explains. "All the other slots are booked the day before or the day that the patient calls in."

She reports that the new system is working very well. "It took some getting used to, but we'd worked hard to educate our patients beforehand," she says.

"The PSP gave us pamphlets, and our staff had a script for talking to people on the phone. The staff members love Advanced Access because now they can get patients in right away, so patients are happier coming into the office."

Kim McDowell is a busy mom of three whose family are patients of Marentette's. She says the new system makes it much easier to see a doctor.

Continued on back

GPSC maintains presence at local and out-of-province conferences

Family Medicine Forum

The GPSC moved forward in increasing national recognition for its programs with an exhibit at the Family Medicine Forum (FMF) in Toronto, November 15 to 17, 2012.

Of prime interest to visitors to the GPSC booth were educational and training programs from the PSP, physician benefits from the Divisions of Family Practice initiative, and full-service fee incentives. Job opportunities and new practice support incentives were the focus of interest among young family physicians.

The PSP also presented a full-day session on its new Child and Youth Mental Health module.

More than 4000 family physicians from across Canada attended the event, which is held annually in a different Canadian city. Next year's conference takes place in Vancouver.

Continued on back

Advanced Access is so much better for our patients and the staff, and easier on my time...Now I can see patients when they need to be seen without having to work extra hours."

— Dr Danielle Marentette, Powell River family physician

PSP Adult Mental Health module presentation wins 2012 Permanente Journal Service Quality Award

The PSP's work to improve adult mental health care in BC gained international recognition at the Institute for Healthcare Improvement's 24th Annual National Forum on Quality Improvement in Health Care, held in Orlando, Florida in December 2012.

The PSP's Adult Mental Health module storyboard presentation won the Kaiser Permanente Journal 2012 Service Quality Award. The award recognizes innovation in health care delivery and quality improvement.

PSP Adult Mental Health module developer Dr Rivian Weinerman accepted the award on behalf of the PSP. The PSP was invited to submit an article for consideration to the *Permanente Journal* on the module and evaluation outcomes.

Advanced Access means family doctor can see patients right away leading to fewer visits to emergency room – Continued from cover

"If it's not urgent, you book and get in later on, maybe a few days later," she says. "If it's urgent, it's wonderful. My son was ill one evening, so I called first thing the next morning and got an appointment right away. An hour and a half later we had a referral to a specialist."

McDowell says that in the past, before Marentette was using the Advanced Access system, she and her son would have been at emergency. "Even if I have to wait three hours after calling the office to see the doctor, at least I'm in the comfort of my own home, not the hospital waiting room with screaming kids."

Marentette says Advanced Access scheduling has improved her satisfaction at work as well. "It's great to see someone who needs to see me right away, and great to know I can get patients in for follow-up," she notes. "And it's definitely meant a lot less visits to emergency for patients. Even when it's serious, I can get them directly admitted to hospital because I've already seen them to assess the problem."

"Advanced Access is so much better for our patients and the staff, and easier on my time," says Marentette. "I used to have to see patients over my lunch, stay late, or send people to emergency. Now I can see patients when they need to be seen without having to work extra hours."

The PSP began as an initiative of the GPSC – a joint committee of the BC Medical Association (BCMA) and the BC Ministry of Health (the ministry) – and now receives additional direction, support, and funding from the Shared Care Committee and the Specialist Services Committee (also partnerships between the BCMA and the ministry).

GPSC maintains presence at local and out-of-province conferences – Continued from cover

St. Paul's CME

A week later, the GPSC hosted a multi-booth exhibit at the St. Paul's Hospital Continuing Medicine Education Conference for Primary Physicians in Vancouver from November 20 to 23.

The exhibit included both physician and staff representatives for the GPSC, PSP, Divisions of Family Practice, and CHARD. Interest in the exhibit was high, with many family physicians bringing specific questions on programs and incentives as well as praise for GPSC programs and how these have improved their professional lives.

More than 1400 family physicians attended the conference, which is considered the gold-standard for CME in BC.

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