



A GPSC Initiative

Background

Practice Support Program

In 2004 and 2005, the General Practice Services Committee (GPSC) held province-wide consultations with about 1000 general practitioners (GPs) to hear their perspectives on the decline of family practice. The committee also listened to their ideas about solutions to the mounting problems of low morale and decreasing professional satisfaction among BC's full-service family practice physicians.

Through these consultations, called Professional Quality Improvement Days (PQIDs), the committee learned that the declining interest in family practice might be curbed if GPs:

- Felt valued.
- Were appropriately compensated for their work.
- Received adequate, ongoing training.
- Were supported to provide high-quality care for an increasingly complex and aging patient population.

The GPSC responded to the request for training and support by establishing the Practice Support Program (PSP) in 2007.

Program design and structure

The PSP is designed to improve clinical and practice management for family physicians (FPs) and GPs and supports physicians to implement tools and resources in their daily practice that can increase efficiency and capacity, improve patient care and professional satisfaction, and reduce costs to the health care system. Specialist physicians may also participate in the program (select training and support modules provided through the PSP are applicable to specialist practices).

The CME-accredited program offers focused training sessions (learning modules) for physicians and their medical office assistants (MOAs) in three domains:

- Clinical improvement.
- Practice management.
- Information technology.

The PSP uses a quality-improvement approach and the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle, in which training sessions are interspersed with action periods, during which new learnings are applied to the day-to-day medical practice.



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Each PSP learning module involves three half-day group learning sessions, offered locally in communities throughout the province. Each group session is followed by an action period of 6 to 8 weeks during which PSP participants try out what they've learned in their own practice. During action periods, participants receive in-practice support to ensure they get as much benefit as possible from the learning sessions, and have the guidance they need to incorporate newly acquired tools and processes into their practices.

Physicians are compensated for attending the learning sessions and for trying small tests of change in their practice during action periods.

Delivery channels

Module learning sessions are organized in communities throughout BC by health authority PSP coordinators and are delivered by local health authority regional support teams (each health authority has its own support team).

Regional support teams include PSP provincial coordinators and *physician practice leaders*; i.e., physicians who have become learning module leaders through participation in train-the-trainer sessions arranged by the PSP provincial coordinating office.

Physicians and MOAs interested in participating in the program can contact the PSP coordinator in their health authority.

In-practice support for participants can be provided in different ways, including:

- Visits from members of local health authority regional support teams.
- In-practice coaching support that meets the needs of a particular physician community.

Participation and results

In its first 2 years, the PSP provided valuable new skills and tools to more than 1400 physicians and MOAs who participated in the program, particularly in the area of increased practice efficiency. In a recent evaluation of the program, 70% of physicians who participated in the Advanced Access learning module said they had reduced patient wait times for regular appointments and 51% reduced wait times for urgent appointments.¹



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As of April 2011, more than half of all GPs in BC and more than 1000 MOAs have participated in the program, improving both patient care and their professional satisfaction. In a recent external evaluation of the program, physicians reported that participating in PSP learning modules has had a positive impact on their practices (Advanced Access, 87.7%; Chronic Disease Management, 80.6%, Group Medical Visits, 86.3%).²

PSP tools and resources are enabling FPs and GPs to better support patients at the primary care level, helping to reduce wait times, increase professional satisfaction, improve care for patients, and lower costs.

Current learning modules

- Advanced Access/Office Efficiency.
- Group Medical Visits (includes Patient Self-management and Health Literacy).
- Chronic Disease Management.
- Adult Mental Health.
- End of Life.
- Child and Youth Mental Health (*in development*).
- Shared System of Care for patients with COPD/CHF (*in development*).
- Quarterly learning sessions (*in development*).

For more information

Visit www.pspbc.ca.

¹ Hollander M, Kadlec H. Evaluation of the Practice Support Program. Final report: End of module surveys – Report on the original four learning modules for the period March 1, 2008 to March 31, 2011. September 2011. p.29.

² Ibid. p.27.