



- DR. ROBERT V. JOHNSTON -



## JOINT ACTION TARGETS PATIENT CARE DELIVERY

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Across Canada, from commissioned reports to provincial initiatives to regional and provider care delivery, there is a growing and compelling call for the improvement of health services through the use of electronic health information. Working together since the fall of 2001, the Western EHR Regional Collaborative (WERC) is a formal partnership of seven regions, all leveraging their significant collective knowledge, experience, and resources to accelerate the development of the Electronic Health Record (EHR) at the care delivery level.

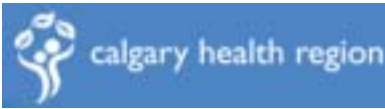
WERC includes Calgary Health Region, Capital Health Authority, Regina Health District, Saskatoon District Health, and Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and Vancouver Island Health Authority have recently become involved in WERC in 'observer roles'. Together, these members represent the large, urban, academic, referral regions, serving a population of 9 Million Canadians for tertiary and other care services in Western Canada.

With the 'flurry' of EHR activity across Canada, particularly at this time in the evolution of plans, initiatives and funding for health infostructures, there is recognition that a pan-Canadian electronic health record is a critical step in reforming health care in Canada. The aim of the EHR and related infostructure developments is to improve patient outcomes. It has been repeatedly shown that an electronic health record can have a significant impact on the quality of care, continuity of care, and patient safety.

To that end, WERC is focusing its efforts on the service delivery level - understanding what information frontline health care providers require and how that information can be effectively collected, shared, and leveraged with effective clinical decision support tools. This critical work needs to be done at the regional, hospital, community and local levels and WERC, through its member health delivery organizations, is well positioned to do this.

WERC participants have identified several major collaborative opportunities. These opportunities include several of the key foundation elements of an electronic health record: developing tools to collect clinical information, tools to share that information among care providers, and the underlying systems to identify patients and providers. All project opportunities are grounded in a collective vision for the 'record' - a regional electronic health record, linked and aligned with provincial and pan-Canadian EHR directions. With work already nearly complete on regional EHR definition and architecture, and on the business requirements for the initial opportunities, the regions are well on track to achieving the benefits of collaboration.

The benefits of working together include the obvious economies of scale, the shared experiences and best practices, the improved inter-operability of information systems among regions, and the establishment of standards across multiple regions and provinces. Not so obvious will be the common and shared approaches possible for change management, training, and other implementation requirements, the common basis for evaluation of EHR projects, the increased awareness and buy-in for health information investment,



and the opportunity to develop the regional and local infrastructure upon which provincial and pan-Canadian EHR developments will depend. The Collaborative believes strongly in “designing from the top-down, and building from the bottom-up” to ensure that the long-term vision is realized while having immediate positive impact at the care delivery level.

WERC is closely linked with the Western Health Information Collaborative (WHIC) in developing its plans and initiatives, with cross representation to each leadership group and between individual project teams. The communications, information sharing, and potential alignment of various opportunities at the regional, provincial and national levels are key to success for all levels of action on the EHR.

Investing in regions to build EHR's and the associated components will accelerate the development of needed work in health care innovation and enable early realization of related benefits. These benefits focus directly on patients, citizens and providers -

providing timely and appropriate access to reliable, accurate health information, both within and between regions. From more effective referrals to improved clinical decision support tools, the sharing of that health information will have a significant impact on quality, continuity and safety of care.

Collaboration to attain and accelerate such benefits has already shown exciting results and even greater potential. The joint action and synergy of these seven regions in Western Canada - the Western EHR Regional Collaborative - will accomplish so much more than any individual action to accelerate and deliver on the tremendous potential of the Electronic Health Record.

Stay tuned!



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